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12 May 2005
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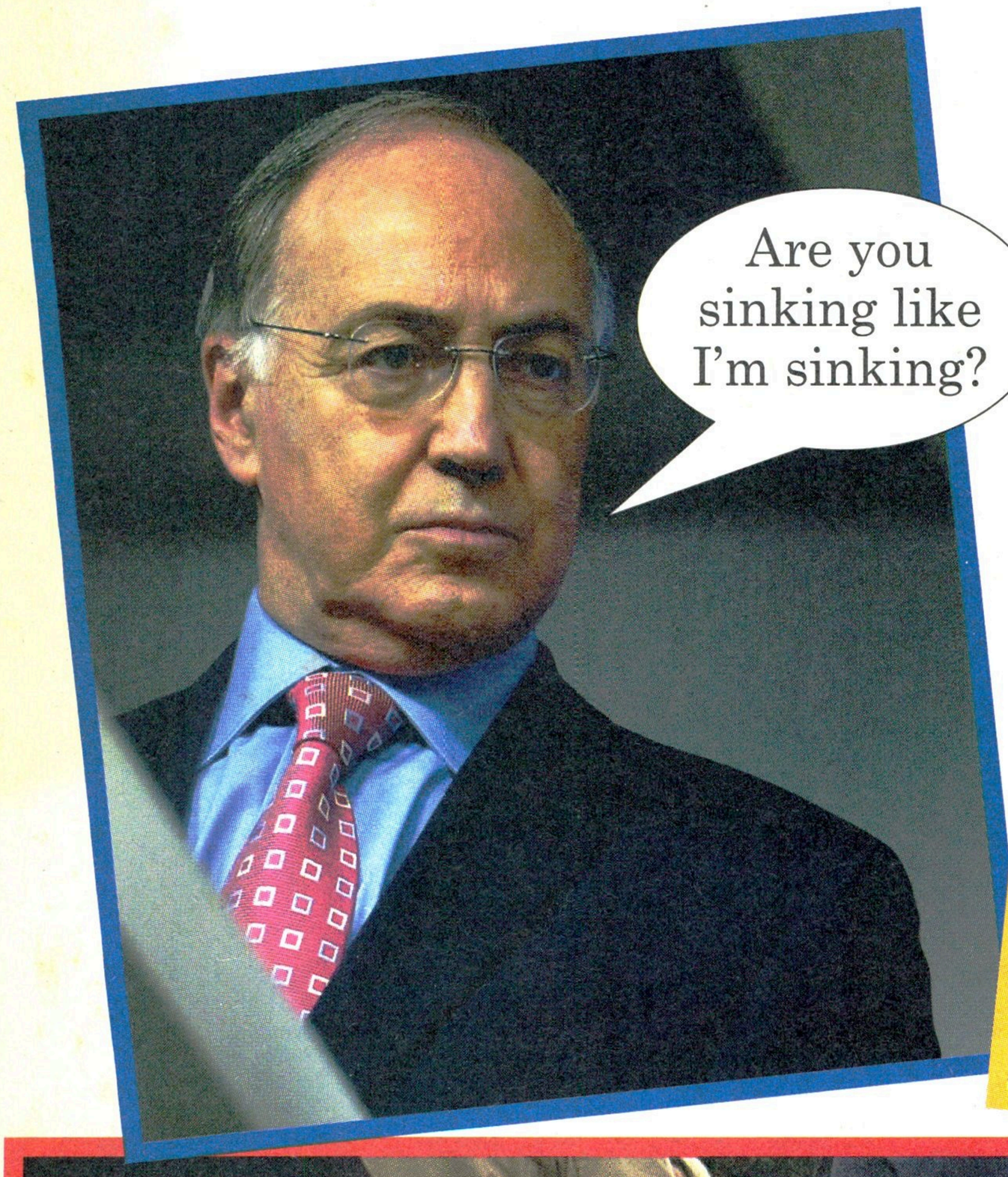
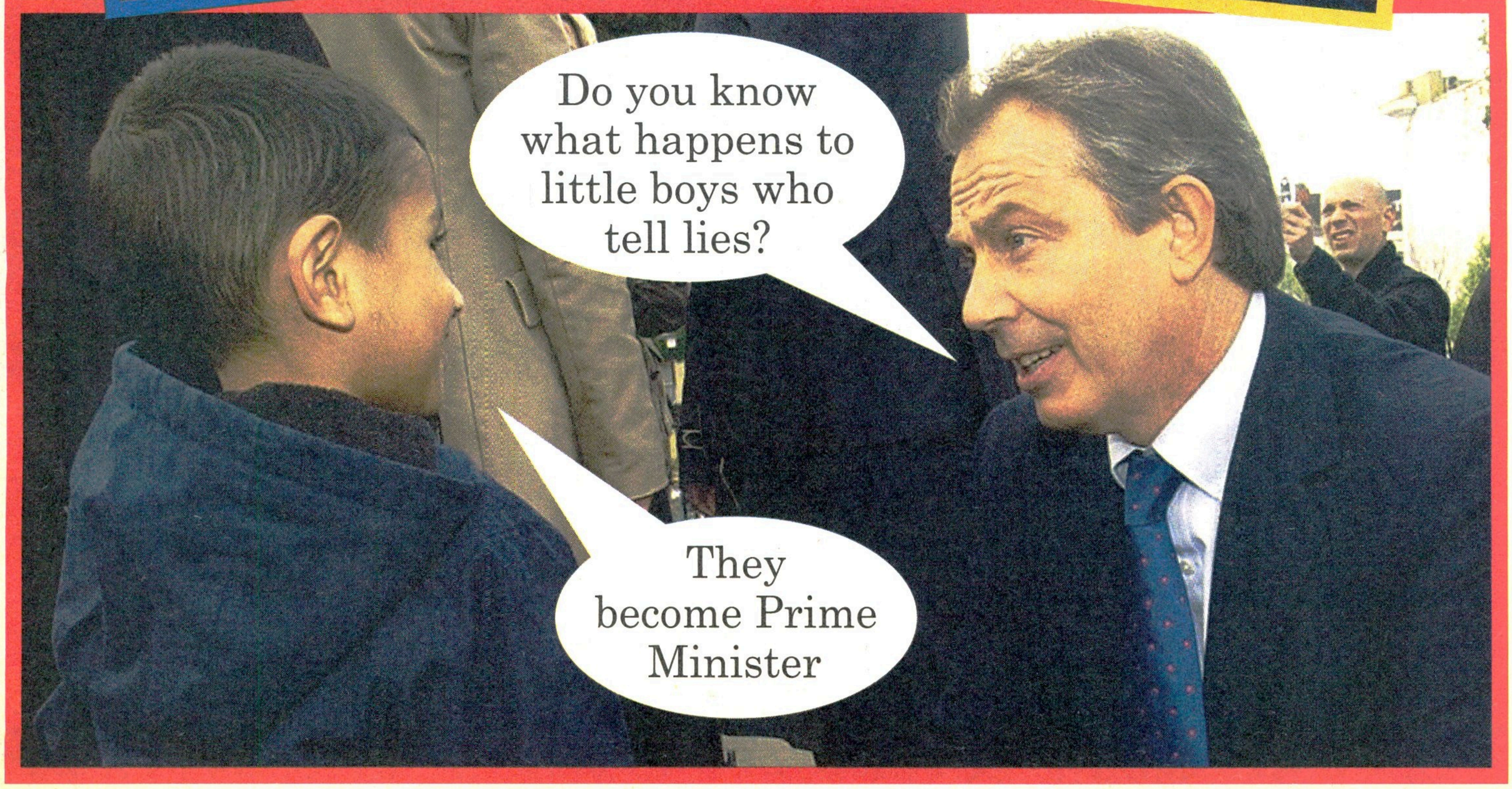
PRIVATE EYE

BUMPER ELECTION SPECIAL





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SHIFT_adventure

Gnome

AFTER a great deal of heart searching and a close examination of the manifestos of the three main parties, I have come to a conclusion as to whom my newspapers should back in the forthcoming general election.

All three parties have many admirable suggestions and policy initiatives, but the fact remains that only one of them is going to win the election. And that's the one that I have decided to support. Therefore I am urging all readers of *The Gnomes, The Gnomes on Sunday, Gnomes of the World* and, of course, the hugely influential *Daily Gnome,* to think very carefully about their democratic responsibilities and to vote for Mr Blair because I say so.

My message to Mr Blair is equally loud and clear – "You owe me one, matey".

Lord Gnome
Gnome International
The Dirty Digger Building
94th Street, Manhattan
New York, New York *(It's a hell of a... lot cheaper than living in Britain and paying tax)*

FAULTY POWERS

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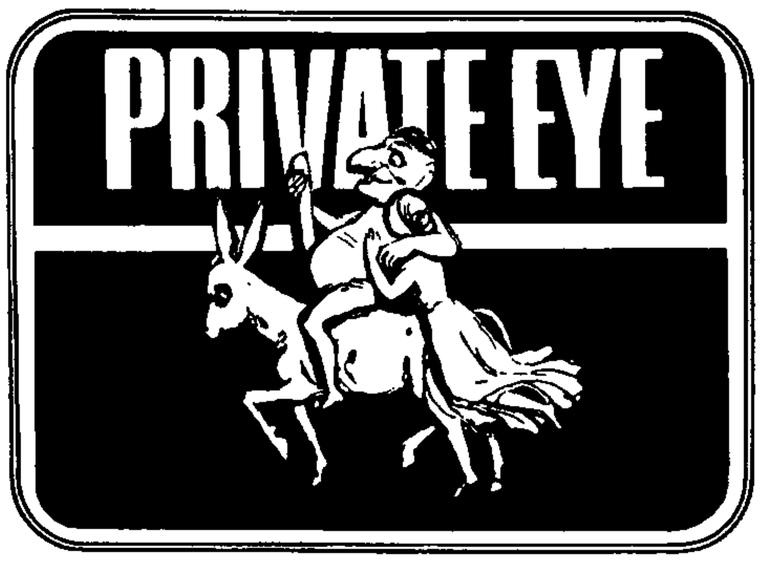

Ahead in the polls

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WITH upwards of 6.5 million postal votes about to be cast, the government, police and election officials are finally beginning to take the whole issue of fraud seriously. But is it too late?

In some marginal seats, applications for postal votes have increased by between 300 and 500 percent on the last general election and trebled overall. But ministers famously declared that "there wasn't enough time" to tighten up the system before 5 May.

Both Labour and the Tories have clearing offices, respectively in Newcastle and Dartford, for voters to send in their applications for postal votes. Up and down the country, individual candidates from all of the parties are offering a similar service. None of this is illegal, but as Richard Mawrey QC discovered in Birmingham, the scope for fraud is massive.

Currently there are 39 police investigations into allegations of postal ballot fraud, including in Cheshire, Derbyshire, Greater Manchester, West Yorkshire and Woking. In Reading police have concluded an investigation, which found that "there was fraud" but said that "there was no evidence to bring charges against individuals". Cheshire police have sent a file to the crown prosecution service over allegations of personation – ie vote stealing – which have seen the arrest of one mayor, Pat Tyrrel of Runcorn.

Police investigations are also proceeding in Bradford, Burnley, Derby and Woking.

A number of arrests have been made in Oldham, where callers were said to have offered to collect ballot papers from houses. Meanwhile Malcolm Dumper, returning officer for Southampton, where applications for postal votes have risen from 2,000 at the last General Election, to 26,000, recently said: "I organise the election in constituencies with high student populations. Many of them live in houses of multiple occupancies, so you can have 20 postal ballot papers being sent to one address. But we don't have the facilities to check these addresses."

The *Times* recently quoted "a Labour party expert" who claimed that: "You need 75,000 votes to win elections in this country, and I know where they all are."

It's all shaping up for the mother of all election fiascos on 5 May.

THERE were floods of crocodile tears from the Dear Leader when he realised that a number of marginal Labour seats could fall victim to a Longbridge backlash after the MG Rover collapse. What to do?

Motor industry experts never believed that Shanghai Automotive Industries had the slightest intention of entering into a joint venture with MG Rover to continue building cars at Longbridge. The main interest was always in the intellectual property rights to the Rover 75 series, which the Chinese company has now secured. Once the Chinese had then seen the books, any vestige of a chance was scuppered.

But it seems that while the Chinese had seen the books and uncovered the black hole contained within them, the government hadn't. Seemingly unaware, in the middle of the crisis, Blair called his opposite number in Beijing, and in a lengthy conversation tried to persuade the Chinese PM to intervene and persuade Shanghai Automotive to reconsider – or, rather, to ignore their own findings. They chose to ignore him instead.

WITH the government's bungling of the MG Rover crisis no doubt costing Labour many votes in the motor industry, ministers are clearly determined the same will not happen with workers in the nuclear business.

Gordon Campbell, chair of BNFL, dived straight into election hot water when he revealed at last week's Technology 2005 exhibition that he had "spoken to sources close to Downing Street" and fully expected an announcement within weeks of the election of an investment in new nuclear reactors.

A blatant attempt to get the industry workers to vote Labour, if ever there was one.

AS ONE of the PFI projects that has earned the most for the private sector (surely "brought the most benefits to the local community"?), Darent Valley Hospital was an obvious stop-off for Tony Blair on the campaign trail.

The PM arrived on 16 April in a convoy of people carriers decorated with the party slogan, "Forward, not back" – a sentiment which was rather undermined by the failure of one of the drivers to apply his handbrake, resulting in the vehicle rolling backwards into the one behind it in the hospital car park while Blair was inside having his heart tested for the cameras.

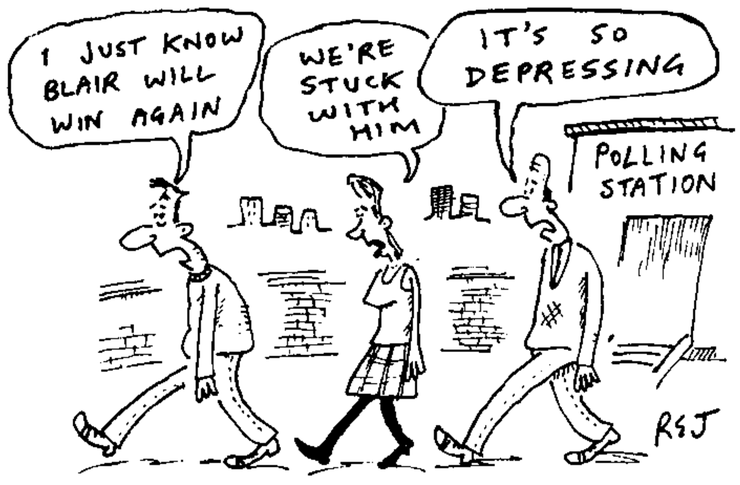
EYE TOLD YOU SO

LAST WEEK, after Tony Blair admitted to Jeremy Paxman that "I don't believe we had any option but to disclose his [Dr David Kelly's] name, because to have failed to do so would have been seen as attempting to conceal something from the committee that was looking into this at the time", shadow foreign secretary Michael Ancram wrote to the prime minister to demand "a clear account of why you have failed to admit this before".

He took his lead from the *Independent*, which insisted that Mr Blair was "admitting for the first time that the government had been responsible for identifying him"; and the *Daily Mail*, which in a pair of furious editorials maintained that it was "an admission after two years of denials".

Well, yes… unless you count his evidence to the Hutton inquiry that during one of the infamous sofa meetings "there was some surprise we expressed to each other… that it had not already leaked, and I think there was no doubt in anyone's mind that if on reinterview it was clear that he was in all probability the source then we were going to have to disclose that," and that "responsibility is mine in the end, I take the decisions as Prime Minister" – a clear admission of responsibility which the *Eye* reported on 3 October 2003.

Low Turnout



NEWS

EYE TOLD YOU SO (AGAIN)

THE £1bn Paddington Health Campus plan *(Eyes passim)* has had the rug pulled out from under it by the owners of the land.

The PHC scheme was to have merged St Mary's Hospital, the specialist Harefield Hospital in Middlesex, the Royal Brompton Hospital in Chelsea and Imperial College's National Heart and Lung Institute together on one central London site at the Paddington Basin regeneration scheme.

The collapse of the project is not the result of NHS chiefs coming to their senses, but the land owners getting fed up with delays. Paddington Development Corporation Ltd (PDCL), owners of the land needed in Paddington, announced last week that they are no longer in discussions with the PHC team and are pursuing other plans for their land. They have also submitted a bill for their legal costs.

Eye 1125 revealed the secret land-swap deal that would have involved handing over the valuable Royal Brompton Hospital site to PDCL. The *Eye* has also monitored the spiralling expected cost of the project which rose from an original estimate of £360m to just over £1bn.

The failed plan leaves the health trusts with a huge pile of bills, including more than £7m spent on consultants.

WHAT should the department of health do with a health boss whose hospital awarded her husband's company £84,000 worth of work? Why, take her on as an adviser of course.

Christine Miles is to take six months off as chief executive of the Royal Orthopaedic Hospital in Birmingham on a secondment to help health trusts in Wales reduce waiting times.

The audit commission is investigating the hospital's contract-awarding after Miles was quizzed at the trust's annual meeting over two IT contracts given to Talquin, a firm co-owned by Miles' husband, Michael Gibbons.

London-based Talquin won £84,000 worth of work at the hospital for computer expertise. Miles denies being involved in the hiring process and finance director Graham Bragg blamed pressures on time for not putting the jobs out for tender.

The amount fell below the £100,000 above which jobs must be put out to competitive tender, but NHS guidelines say business contracts may only be awarded to close relatives if won in fair competition against other tenders.

THE most baffling response to the prospect of British company tax rules being overruled by the European court of justice, (see last *Eye*), came from the director-general of the CBI Sir Digby Jones.

Britain's principal business lobbyist was reported by the *Sunday Times* to view the development as "signalling a dangerous loss of autonomy over tax policy for Britain and other member states".

Such a dire prospect hasn't prevented many of Sir Digby's member firms claiming billions of pounds from the exchequer on the grounds that European law should prevail over British law. Among the biggest of them, challenging UK legislation against tax avoidance, is Cadbury Schweppes – a company whose chief executive John Sunderland happens to be president of... the CBI!

Street Of Shame

STUNG by the universal derision heaped upon them for their decision to launch criminal proceedings in France against the *Times* and its editor Robert Thomson, the Barclay brothers sent out an official spokesman to assure reporters that there was nothing unusual in their bypassing of the British legal system.

"The spokesman denied there was anything unusual in the brothers filing their complaint in France, where libel is a criminal action, given that they live for much of the time in Monaco," the *Guardian* reported.

Whoops! The last time the brothers dragged a British newspaper through the French courts it was for this very crime – when hack John Sweeney mentioned in a 1996 *Observer* article that they had a residence in the principality. The peculiar pair objected to this revelation, claiming it put them at risk of "kidnapping, deprivation of freedom and terrorist attacks".

With such important principles at stake, can it be long before the Barclays slap a writ on themselves for such a gross infringement of their own privacy?

"SEVENTEEN thousand workers need answers," declared the *Guardian* on 16 April following the collapse of MG Rover. "This venture was a pipe dream from the day BMW handed over the keys. But that does not excuse those who willed the workers and everyone else into pursuing the fantasy."

Indeed it does not. And that includes the paper which greeted that day, 10 May 2000, with the headlines "How they won on the last lap" and "Euphoric workers uncork the bubbly". It also pointed out that "when John Towers put pen to paper, the jobs of thousands of West Midlands car workers were saved and a major British-owned mass car maker was born... Towers will now become known as the man who saved Rover."

Which was the fantasist in question? The *Guardian,* naturally.

FOLLOWING revelations about David and Victoria Beckham's marriage from their former nanny, *Sun* columnist Jane Moore was clear who was most at fault. "The previous betrayals of various chauffeurs, bodyguards, assistants and beauticians pale into insignificance alongside the blatant duplicity of a woman to whom they entrusted the care of their much-loved children... Relationships are hard enough, but the constant drip drip of high profile betrayals make their determination to stay strong all the more remarkable. Whatever their problems, isn't it time they were cut a little slack?"

Her words were in no way undermined by the fact that it was her own employer, *News International*, who had provided the thirty pieces of silver for this Judas through sister paper the *News of the World*... or the fact that her opinion appeared on the same page as a Sun "Exclusive" that "the couple's bust-ups reached such a pitch at one point that they hardly ever slept together, a friend revealed last night".

A GOOD omen for the Tories has appeared in the unlikely form of an *Observer* article by Anthony Seldon, biographer of both Tony Blair and John Major, warning that "the Conservatives are doomed to fail again".

Can a Tory landslide be far behind, given Seldon's record as a tipster?

As *Eye* readers may recall, in October 1994 he wrote in the *Times* that John Major had "put the Conservatives on course for the fifth general election victory, which many believed to be impossible... He could yet have the last laugh". As late as October 1996 Seldon informed *Daily Mail* readers that "the Tories in the general election could win back the by-election losses since 1992, which would give them a working majority... The Tories remain a formidable fighting force... The outcome of the general election is still open." Seven months later the Conservatives duly suffered their worst electoral catastrophe since 1906.

Last summer Seldon was in Cassandra mode again when he told the *Evening Standard* that there would be change in either 10 or 11 Downing Street within six months. "By Christmas there may be a major showdown with Brown, and Blair may be forced to fire him," he revealed. "The current status quo can't go on."

LOVING female 49, slim/medium build, many interests, seeks that special, kind, caring, honest gut, to share life with.

Hull Daily Mail

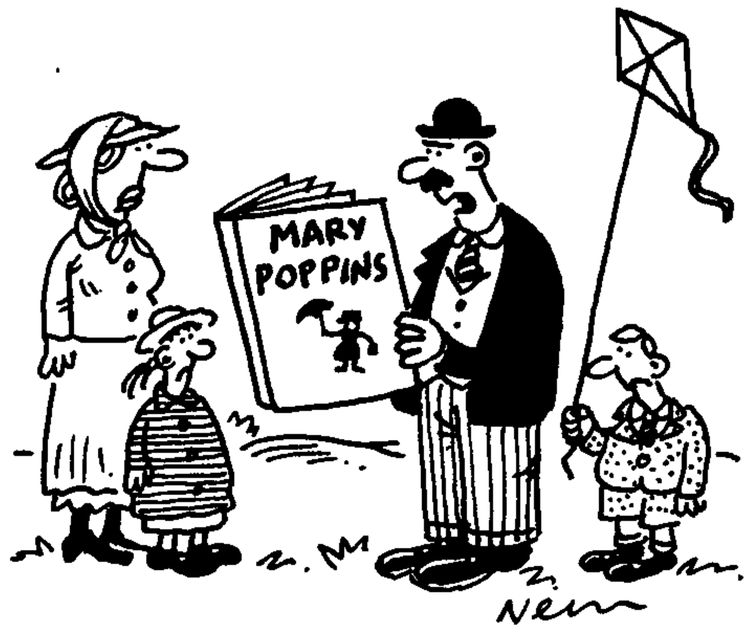
Number crunching

£300,000

■ Amount the Beckham's nanny was paid by News of the World for revelations about the state of their marriage

£500,000

■ Amount the Beckhams spent on a "birthday treat" trip to Paris to distract the press from those revelations



"So much for our nanny confidentiality agreement"

ISSUING a writ against the *Sun* for its claim that he had slapped his girlfriend Coleen McLoughlin during a row in a nightclub, footballer Wayne Rooney claimed the story was merely the straw that broke the camel's back.

"Wayne has been subject to a campaign by the *Sun* and a lot of it has been totally untrue," a "source close to the footballer" told the *Guardian*. "Rebekah Wade has made it clear that Wayne is not a proper role model and is looking for a scalp. The campaign against him has become very personal."

Indeed it has. As recently as last July the paper spent several days revealing intimate details of Rooney's home life and childhood experiences, and only paid him £250,000 for the privilege.

The paper's fawning serialisation of the Euro 2004 hero's life story caused outrage on Merseyside, and it was only when Rooney's management resisted Wade's attempt to enlist the potato-faced striker to her belated apology for the *Sun*'s Hillsborough coverage – issuing a statement pointing out that "Wayne and his fiancée Coleen… wish to make it clear that the sentiments expressed in (the) *Sun* were the views of that newspaper alone and we were not asked to, nor did we, endorse them" – that Wade decided he was a villain rather than a hero, and ordered her team into the red light district of Liverpool to start digging for dirt.

"THERE are always people out there who mistake their imagination for their memory. Richard Nixon, Jeffrey Archer, Piers Morgan, to name but a few."

This fond tribute from Des Kelly, Moron's former deputy editor at the *Mirror*, appeared in the *Daily Mail* on 20 April – and was amply confirmed the very next day when the army dropped court-martial proceedings against a man accused of faking the notorious photos which led to Piers' downfall. Brimming with self-righteous jubilation, Moron told Radio 4's *PM* programme: "I think it is about time the government and the ministry of defence and the Queen's Lancashire Regiment put up some real evidence that these pictures were indeed a hoax."

As Piers well knows, the scrapping of the court-martial had nothing to do with the quality of evidence. The problem was one of jurisdiction: if the defendant (an army reservist who works for the Inland Revenue) did fake the photos, he would have been off-duty at the time and therefore not subject to military law. The CPS now has to decide whether to prosecute Private Stuart Mackenzie in the normal courts.

Regardless of Mackenzie's guilt or innocence, the fact that the photos were faked by *someone* is now universally accepted – except, it seems, by Moron. In his *PM* interview, the disgraced and increasingly deranged ex-editor claimed that the dropping of the court-martial on a legal technicality left him "totally vindicated".

Nurse! The screens!

A NEWS front has been opened in Richard "Dirty" Desmond's war against milord Rothermere. He'll fight him on the beaches, and now he'll even fight him in feature spreads about quiet Shropshire towns.

On page 40 of last Saturday's *Express*, Paul Callan mused on what England would have been like had the Nazis won World War II and actually used Bridgnorth as their HQ – an eccentric Hitler plan revealed last week by archive documents. Set on St George's Day 1955, Callan's piece imagined a pair of unhappy drinkers in a local pub, muttering about the German occupiers: "They both glanced around nervously – and particularly in the direction of the thin man in the corner who was reading a copy of the *Daily Mail*, the pro-Nazi newspaper the Germans allowed to be published." Soon, however, "the thin man in the corner set down his newspaper – even he tired of its ranting propaganda".

Callan's willingness to suck up to his proprietor is most creditable, and will undoubtedly ensure a swift renewal of his freelance contract.

A RESPECTABLE woman fights off a gun-wielding mugger in a posh London street – a gift, one would think, to the *Daily Mail* in the midst of an election campaign, especially given that she obligingly confirmed that the gunman had "an Eastern European accent".

Instead it was Nicola Horlick who got it in the neck from the paper, with hack Geoffrey Wansell doing his best to emulate his namesake and master of the poison-pen profile Geoffrey Levy, pointing out that "there are some among her former colleagues in the Square Mile who are distinctly unimpressed with her 'bravery'. Indeed, they went as far as to suggest that her flagrant refusal to consider what might have happened to her five children had she been killed is further evidence of the self-absorption that has characterised her entire career."

"These are my daughters: Addenda and Corrigenda"

IN ITS recent hatchet-job on the NHS – thinly disguised as a "major investigation" into Labour's obsession with waiting-times – the *Sunday Telegraph* sent hacks and work-experience interns to A&E departments with fake ailments so they could record their miserable waits in Dickensian conditions before finally being seen by incompetent staff.

Alas! One of the work-experience team duly arrived at Epsom General Hospital with a "painful wrist", only to be seen within minutes by a helpful doctor who promptly called for an x-ray, found a (genuine) fracture and had her arm put in a cast.

Strangely, the resulting shock-horror *exposé* on the state of A&E departments had no mention of the super-efficient service provided by Epsom. Instead the two-page spread was filled with tired old flam on hospital targets provided by the Tories, which was so feeble even the *Daily Mail* couldn't be bothered to follow it up the next day.

WHEN undercover reporters from the *Sun* managed to infiltrate Windsor Castle earlier this month, the paper's glee could hardly be contained.

"The *Sun*'s Windsor security breach made headlines around the world," the paper boasted on the day before the royal wedding. "Our scoop was picked up and reported as far afield as the USA, India, Australia, Denmark and Switzerland… it was splashed over worldwide TV news channels all day."

Curiously, when the paper exposes good security in action, it is not quite so thrilled. On 11 April, just five days after the Windsor incident, *Sun* hack Brian Flynn was detained by immigration officers at Dover after attempting to gain entry to the country posing as a bogus asylum-seeker. Rumbled after his failure to understand any Serbo-Croat or Albanian despite claiming to come from Kosovo, Flynn was forced to make a panicked phonecall to Wapping to plead for deputy editor Fergus Shanahan to intercede before he was arrested.

So how did the *Sun* report this exemplary enforcement of Britain's strict border controls? Curiously, not a single word about the incident has appeared in the paper.

WHEN Rupert Murdoch recently avoided a £500m tax bill on News Corporation's move from Australia to the States by reincorporating the company that owns his family's NewsCorp shares in Bermuda, it wasn't surprising to find no mention of the scam in the *Times*. But why was the *Independent*, normally interested in such matters, the only other broadsheet not to report it?

Could the omission be anything to do with the novel way in which the Indy's Irish proprietor Sir Tony O'Reilly owns his 27 percent stake in the paper, involving a series of trusts based in the equally tax-friendly haven of the Bahamas?

Sir Tony also considers himself resident in the islands for tax purposes despite having claimed British citizenship (but not tax status) to enable him to take his title four years ago.

The most recent not-so-*Independent* look at offshore accounts, shortly after Sir Tony got his gong, opened by asking: "Offshore investments are the small change of such folk as Sir Richard Branson, Osama Bin Laden, Sir Sean Connery, Rupert Murdoch, Jeffrey Archer, Michael Ashcroft and past and present cabinet ministers such as Labour's Geoffrey Robinson, but how about the rest of us?"

And how about Sir "Phoney" O'Reilly, as he is affectionately known in the Republic?

Stiff contest for best cemetery

Yorkshire Evening Post

IN HIS excellent "Bad Science" column in the *Guardian*, hack Ben Goldacre invites readers to send in spurious statistics and pseudish gobbledeygook which have appeared in print courtesy of what he calls the "bunch of humanities graduates" who run the media.

Perhaps he should take a look at John Sutherland's apocalyptic *Guardian* column of 18 April, in which he claimed that "with avian flu's lethality running at 70 percent, the Black Death (a paltry 40 percent) pales into insignificance… Assuming the virus learns how to infect us, and assuming it maintains the same killing potency, some 70 percent of the British population won't have access to the [antiviral booster] and some 70 percent of them will be getting their invitation to the Masque of the Red Death."

Sadly for Sutherland, as the paper's Corrections and Clarifications column was forced to admit four days later: "It is not likely that 70 percent of us would die if there was an avian flu outbreak tomorrow… The two figures cannot be compared. Black Death is believed to have infected about 40 percent of the population and to have had a mortality rate close to 100 percent." John Sutherland of course is professor of, er, Modern English Literature at UCL.

"This map's three weeks out of date! It's useless!"

Footballers' wives

THE NEW MYSTIC MOGG

"Lord St John of Fawsley, who is a committed Catholic, said the [Pope's] funeral was likely to take place some time this week, but there was no special reason for it to be held on Friday. 'There is normally an interval. We have got to give time for lying in state and we have got to give time for arrangements to be made.'" – *Birmingham Post*, 4 April.

"Lord St John of Fawsley said he did not believe the couple, due to marry this Friday, would abandon their wedding plans if it clashed with the funeral. Despite the eyes of the world being turned to Rome, Lord Fawsley [*sic*] said Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles would press ahead regardless. 'I think they are so anxious to get 8 April out of the way, if there was an eclipse of the sun they would stick to that date'." – *Belfast Newsletter*, 4 April.

"The decision of the engaged pair themselves to postpone the wedding, in a happy augury of their unselfishness and sense of appropriateness, promises well for the future… The important point is that the couple, with the aid of their unfairly maligned advisers, got their timing right."– Lord St John of Fawsley, *Independent on Sunday*, 10 April.

"I think we could have a hung Parliament, or even a Conservative victory." – Lord St John of Fawsley, *Evening Standard*, 14 April.

AFTER shunting his most popular columnist, W.F. Deedes, from his regular Monday spot to a less coveted position at the end of the week, *Daily Telegraph* editor Martin Newland has inflicted a further indignity on the venerable Deedes family.

Lord Deedes's grandson Henry was only too pleased to be offered a large picture byline when he stood in for the editor of the Saturday Spy diary column, and posed proudly for the photographer in his dinner suit. But the *Telegraph*'s designers then airbrushed out his bow tie, on the grounds that he appeared "too posh" – leaving the poor boy with a buttoned-up dress shirt.

CONSTERNATION at the *Observer* over the latest hiring by the increasingly eccentric editor Roger Alton – Ned Temko, who was until recently editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* and presided over a fall in circulation from 50,000 to 35,000 during his 15 years at the helm.

Temko is an American hack who previously worked in the Middle East for the *Christian Science Monitor* and is now writing a book about Judaism, called *God For Grown-Ups*. He has no Westminster experience whatever. So Alton has naturally decided he is the ideal person for the job of, er, chief political correspondent.

HACKWATCH

Nostra Culpa

QUESTIONS, questions: *Daily Mail* headline-writers love them, even though the answer to most of these queries is so blindingly obvious that readers can save themselves the bother of reading any further – "Is There a £100,000 Winning Wallet Inside Today?", "Is This the Ghastliest Couple in Britain?", "Can These Jodhpurs Cure Your Cellulite?"

Last Tuesday they came up with a classic of the genre atop a huge op-ed piece by Henry Kelly: "Did two men who died hundreds of years ago know the identity of the next pope (and will their dire warnings for the church come true)?" The two men were the 12th-century Irish prophet St Malachy and, of course, Nostradamus – whose predictions, according to Kelly, are "mind-boggling in their accuracy".

Nostradamus needs no introduction to *Mail* readers. "He's the most talked-about astrologer of the age," the paper announced in a millennial feature on 1 January 2000. "And today, Nostradamus joins the *Daily Mail*." Since then he has been an even more reliable editorial standby than cellulite-killing jodhpurs.

Within a year of his arrival, however, the new contributor's reputation was already rather tainted. In November 2000 a long feature about Michael Abram, the man who tried to kill George Harrison, noted that his "disintegrating grip on reality" led him to believe that "Nostradamus's predictions had personal significance for him… Abram became convinced Harrison was, in his words, 'the phantom menace the alien from hell' Nostradamus predicted would come down from heaven and destroy the earth".

Learning of this, some editors might pause to wonder if it was wise to inflict Nostradamus on their readers without some kind of health warning. Not Paul Dacre, however. Only a month later (30/12/00) the *Mail* ran a double-page spread by Colin Wilson under another of its famous interrogative headlines: "Did this year's floods prove Nostradamus right and that his predicted Apocalypse will happen in 2001?"

Wilson's fears were aroused by this prediction: "The year 1999 seven months, from the sky will come the great King of Terror. Like the great king of the Angolmois. Before and after Mars will reign happily." When Nostradamus wrote 1999, according to Wilson, he clearly meant "the last year of the twentieth century", ie 2000. Lo and behold, in the summer of 2000 the heaviest rains in three centuries flooded thousands of British homes – "and as if to drive home the point that chaos is never far below the surface, a train accident at Hatfield caused confusion all over the rail network". Was this really the dread apocalypse foretold by Nostradamus? "Unfortunately, no. He said '1999 sept mois'… So his prophecy of the King of Terror could apply to 2000 plus seven months – next July."

July 2001 passed off without the world coming to an end – but of course three months later something did happen, and a news headline on 12 September 2001 posed the inevitable question: "Did Nostradamus predict it all?" The equally inevitable answer, according to the *Mail*, was yes, since the prophet had warned that "the sky will burn at 45 degrees". Indeed Nostradamus even foresaw "that George W. Bush was in Florida, far away from the city at the time", for another of his verses reads: "The king to stay outside, he will stay far from the enemy."

Colin Wilson returned to the theme a few months later, under the obligatory headline "Is This Proof We Can See Into the Future?" (16/2/02.) The problem with Nostradamus's prophecies, he conceded, "is that they are so obscure that even the experts disagree about their meaning". But not that ambiguous, apparently: only a few paragraphs later Wilson described Nostradamus's prophecies as "precise glimpses of what is going to happen". Two months later (20/4/02) came another instalment: "Did Nostradamus Predict the Twin Towers? If He Did, What's Next is Even More Terrifying."

According to a new interpretation of the prophecies, the state of Israel "will be completely wiped out" by 2003. Then, "in 2006 a sudden attack by the Russians will annihilate western forces in the Mediterranean, and a nuclear missile will destroy the White House and kill the American president. That will be the beginning of World War Three – and most of Europe, including Britain, will be conquered by 2011". Although they might be tempted "to dismiss all this with contempt", *Mail* readers were urged to resist the temptation – for "Nostradamus often showed himself to be disturbingly accurate".

Quite so. On the eve of the England-Brazil game at the 2002 World Cup, for instance, the *Mail* reported that England would win 1-0 and go on to claim the trophy. "Nostradamus's prophecies predict a winning goal from Beckham, with the soothsayer stating: 'The strike of the foot shall repay a thousand feet'. And he foretells an 'English title' when a great man of destiny takes up arms on behalf of his adopted country – taken to mean England's Swedish boss Sven Goran Eriksson." (20/6/02.)

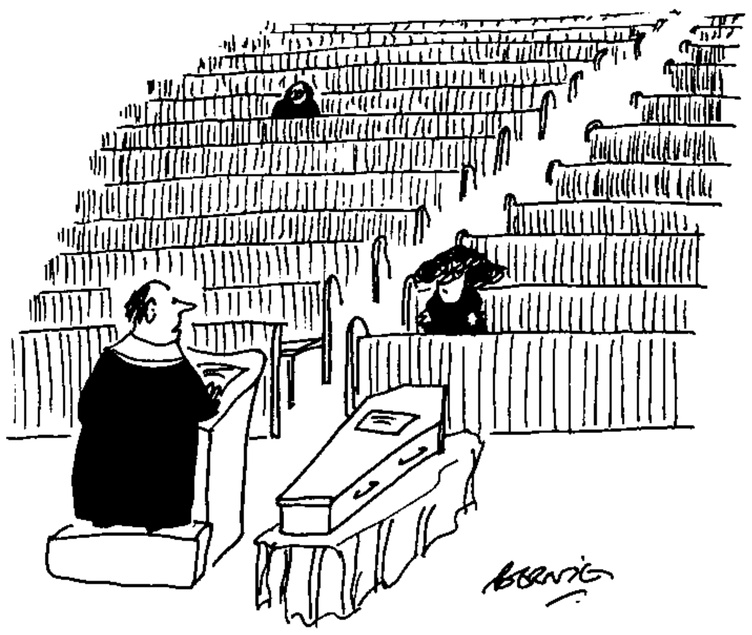
Actually, England lost 2-1 – but then a 16th-century astrologer can't be expected to know much about football. As Henry Kelly stressed last Tuesday: "It is his papal predictions that are uncanny"; and on the question of John Paul II's successor "Nostradamus is very clear. 'Then shall one be elected… who shall not be too much in conformity with the Romans'. This suggests a non-European, but not necessarily an African." So it must be Cardinal Hummes, the Archbishop of Sao Paulo. "Given the history of the Church in Latin America, it might be time for a 'liberalisation' of attitudes, led by the continent which gave us liberation theology." Uncanny indeed. Later that same day, the white smoke rose from the Vatican chimney, and we learned that Paul Dacre's in-house mystic had disgraced himself again.

Will Nostradamus's contract now be terminated? As with all *Daily Mail* questions (Is the Pope a Protestant? Do bears use public lavatories?) the answer is, er, no.

***DAILY Telegraph* chief sports writer Paul Hayward used a recent column to point out the worryingly low profile of today's best cricketers. He complained that only seven in every 100 people said they would recognise England player Freddie Flintoff.**

Directly below Hayward's article was a news piece on England cricketer Andrew Strauss with an accompanying photograph of the brilliant batsman. Er, except it wasn't Strauss at all, but a Middlesex team-mate called Jamie Dalrymple. It seems the *Torygraph* sports subs won't be giving cricketers a recognition boost any time soon.

To add insult to injury, the *Telegraph* had not only failed to recognise one of the nation's best cricketers, but also one of their own colleagues: Strauss writes a regular column for the *Sunday Telegraph*.



"I see this as not so much a funeral, more a celebration of his life..."

SPEAKING to the *Irish Times* last week, Paul Bigley, the brother of Ken, the hostage murdered in Iraq, recalled events at the memorial service which was held at Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral last November at which Tony Blair gave a reading.

"The public had gone their way and more than 100 family and dignitaries were invited into our Lady's Chapel for refreshments. On the spur of the moment I went up to the prime minister and told him that I had no personal grudge against him, it was his handling of the Iraq issue that I was against," Bigley told the paper.

"Tony Blair replied: 'I understand, it's quite all right Paul.' Later, I approached Jack Straw and I also thanked him for attending and said I wanted to apologise if I had offended him in any way personally… He smiled: 'Not at all, no offence taken.' "

Then, just as Bigley was about to take his leave, he told the *Irish Times* that the foreign secretary pulled him to one side and whispered, "Oh, by the way Paul, you have a rapport with the media. Do you think the next time you are on air you could mention this fact, you know, apologise, because Mr Blair is rather concerned about his re-election chances."

Mr Bigley, who described himself as "flabbergasted", did not take Mr Straw up on his suggestion. But perhaps more surprisingly, the foreign office was happy to admit to Straw's indiscretion. "The foreign secretary… added that if at any stage Mr Bigley felt able to reflect these sentiments in public the foreign secretary would welcome it," a spokesman told the paper.

"NEW" Labour chiefs sighed with relief when they learned that Welsh Assembly member Peter Law had thrown in the towel in the Labour heartland seat of Blaenau Gwent.

Law had been diagnosed with a brain tumour and underwent six hours of surgery. He had been intending to run as an Independent against the Blairite Maggie Jones, who was gifted on the constituency courtesy of an all-wimmin shortlist and as thanks for her loyal service in supporting Mr Tony on Labour's NEC.

When she was selected for the constituency 18 months ago, barely one in 10 of the local party's 600 members bothered to show up: more were demonstrating outside the hall. Afterwards most of the local party executive announced that they would be campaigning in nearby marginal Monmouth in protest. But relief soon turned to fear, as Law emerged from hospital… and announced that he would be running after all!

ELECTION NEWS

NICK HERBERT is the Tory who was parachuted into Arundel after the abrupt sacking of Howard Flight for going off-message. But it seems he too has some problems with toeing the party line.

"I am appalled by John Prescott's proposals to impose 47,000 new houses in West Sussex," he wrote in a letter to electors on 9 April. Which is odd, as Tory-controlled West Sussex county council – whose leader Henry Smith just happens to be the party's PPC in the neighbouring Labour-held seat of Crawley – recently agreed to proposals to build, er, 46,500 new houses in West Sussex.

Indeed, in one of his regular columns for the *Crawley Observer* last November, Smith replied to the question "Why is West Sussex County Council against new house building?" in no uncertain terms. "We're not," he thundered. "West Sussex believes there is a need, especially for new affordable housing… The county council has just signed off its structure plan which sets out where houses will be built over the next 12 years. This includes a total of 46,500 new homes across West Sussex."

FACT: On the county council register of interests, Henry Smith gives his occupation as "self-employed in property finance".

FACT: Tory PPC for Mid-Sussex, wedged between the Crawley and Arundel constituencies, is our old friend Nicholas "Fatty" Soames, who has considerable financial interests in housebuilding activities in West Sussex (see *Eyes passim*). But that has never stopped him from simultaneously campaigning against the "concreting over of the Sussex countryside", so perhaps Nick Herbert can be forgiven for his confusion.

RECENT editions of the *Eye* may have inadvertently given the impression that George Galloway, the Respect candidate in Bethnal Green and Bow, is somehow less committed to the cause of human rights than he likes people to think.

In issue 1129 we reported how he had declared "I am for human rights" and pledged to raise the issue during a visit to Bangladesh, where abuses are common. When he actually got there, however, he kept schtum on the subject.

In issue 1130 we noted that Galloway had failed to sign a Commons early-day motion condemning human rights abuses in Burma, to which 289 MPs had added their names. Indeed, according to campaigners, he has never expressed any support for the democracy movement in Burma.

Last week, however, Galloway did make an impassioned plea for the release of a prominent "political prisoner". He told al-Jazeera television that Tariq Aziz, Iraqi foreign minister under Saddam Hussein, was an "eminent diplomatic and intellectual person". Aziz – who was implicated in the gas attack which killed hundreds in the Kurdish town of Halabja in 1988 and who has been accused by former opponents of the regime of shooting prisoners personally – was being held "illegally" in a Baghdad prison, said Galloway, and should be released forthwith. The *Eye* is happy to correct any misunderstanding that may have arisen about Mr Galloway's true position.

MR Law 'n' Order, home secretary Charles Clarke, has been criticised by the parliamentary commissioner for standards Sir Philip Mawer for using the Commons as the registered business address of his since dissolved lobbying company, Quality Public Affairs, in 1997-8. This follows a complaint to the parliamentary commissioner.

Clarke has had to apologise even though this was not a breach of the code of conduct for MPs or company law. The matter would have been more serious had QPA been trading at this time, but Clarke advised that the company ceased trading before he became an MP in 1997.

Equally embarrassingly, Companies House told Mawer that even though QPA had ceased trading it should still have filed accounts for the year to August 1998. This failure was not pursued because the company applied to be dissolved in 1999.

Clarke says he was trading as a sole trader using the company name QPA which gives a somewhat different impression to the more grandiose claim on his website that from 1992 to 1997 he was "chief executive" of QPA.

"Don't mention the Blair. I did once but I think I got away with it"

"ZERO tolerance policing" is the campaign battle-cry of Greg Hands, Tory candidate in London's most marginal seat, Hammersmith and Fulham. This comes as a surprise to those who were fellow-undergraduates 20 years ago at Robinson College, Cambridge, where Hands was notorious for the sort of behaviour which today would earn him an instant Asbo.

In a village pub one night, after being rebuked by the landlady for his unruly drunkenness, Hands went out of the back door and set fire to a heap of refuse sacks stacked up against the half-timbered building. The college authorities persuaded the landlady to let them deal with it rather than involving the police, and set up a disciplinary tribunal. Thanks partly to a good character testimony from his tutor, they decided not to expel the young lout but merely to restrict him to college grounds.

Had a zero tolerance policy been in force, he would have been sent down at once without a degree. And where would he be now?

THERE's conspicuous gap in the list of parliamentary candidates for the two Dundee constituencies.

Where is Giovanni di Stefano, the notorious lawyer to Saddam Hussein, Jonathan King and countless other villains, who was profiled in the last *Eye*?

One little-known aspect of di Stefano's rococo CV is as leader of the Radical Party of Great Britain, which he founded last year to "represent reasonable, tolerant yet stern and protective values in Great Britain", whatever that may mean. On 1 April he told the *Dundee Courier* he intended to stand in one of the city's constituencies at the general election – and the paper noted that "even though it may be April Fool's Day, the contentious figure is deadly serious". When the closing date for nominations passed, however, he was unaccountably absent from the ballot paper.

Many Dundonians still recall di Stefano's brief spell on the board of Dundee FC shortly before it went into administration, when he reneged on his pledge to provide £26m in investment for the club – and their attitude is definitely more "stern" than "tolerant". Has it belatedly dawned on him that this might not be the best place from which to start his quest for political glory?

FORMER home secretary David Blunkett ignored anti-sleaze guidelines when he took a part-time job as an adviser "giving seminars on relationship between government and business".

The advisory committee on business appointments vets new jobs for retiring top civil servants and army officers to ensure there are no conflicts of interest. Since 1995 it has also advised former ministers about possible "impropriety" in their new private sector jobs.

However, after his resignation Blunkett ignored the committee when he took a job with Indepen Consulting Ltd, even though he was clearly going to draw on his recent government experience.

According to the register of members' interests, Blunkett receives "£15-20,000" from Indepen. Its clients include several firms with an obvious interest in developing a "relationship" with government: private water firms Anglian Water, United Utilities and Thames Water, not to mention South West Trains. Mobile phone firms $MM0_2$ and T Mobile, both involved in attempts to force multi-million pound refunds from the treasury, also hire Indepen.

Blunkett told *Private Eye* that he had not consulted the committee because "I understood it's optional" and "Indepen had no connections whatsoever with my job as home secretary or my previous job as education secretary".

FOCUS ON FOLKESTONE

LAST *Eye*'s story on how tactical voting by Labour supporters (for the Lib Dem Peter Carroll) could unseat Michael Howard in Folkestone, clearly impressed foreign office minister Denis MacShane. He told the Kent Messenger: "If I was a Folkestone resident, I would be telling people to unite around the candidate best-placed to dislodge Michael Howard."

That candidate is, of course, Carroll, rather than Labour's Maureen Tomison, 63. So why the antipathy in Labour for Tomison?

It dates from the early 1990s when the Major government identified Ebbsfleet, the remote and contaminated home of a former cement works, as the possible site for a station on the rail link between London and Ashford. Its owner, Blue Circle, saw a chance to make a mint but faced stiff competition from Stratford and Rainham. So it hired lobbyists Decision Makers, led by Tomison, a former Tory election candidate with excellent contacts in the Tory government, to make its case.

Chancellor Kenneth Clarke and environment minister John Gummer attended her second wedding and, better still, her co-director at Decision Makers was Angela Rumbold, a former home office minister who was deputy chairman of the party with responsibility for candidate selection.

In May 1993 Decision Makers prepared a strategy document on how it planned to use its political contacts. Everyone from Major to transport secretary John MacGregor would be lobbied. MacGregor's political adviser Eleanor Laing (now in the shadow cabinet) was "a key target", the document said.

Gummer and former minister Tony Baldry were wined and dined, as were the Michaels Heseltine and Portillo. By November 1993 Tomison had helped arrange at least 10 opportunities to present the views of Blue Circle to top Tory ministers.

When Ebbsfleet was finally announced as winner in August 1994, shares in Blue Circle surged. But in October the Blue Circle document fell into the hands of the *Evening Standard* and Tomison's and Rumbold's activities were rumbled.

Dame Angela resigned from Decision Makers, Major set up the inquiry into standards in public life under Lord Nolan and both women were asked to appear before its first session. In May 1995 Lord Nolan issued an interim report saying MPs should not be involved with lobbying companies. Rumbold lost her seat in 1997 and Tomison lost her company.

In 2001 the woman who enjoyed so much influence with the Conservative leadership chose to switch political horses. Why she might want to do this is obvious. But why Labour would chose this lifetime Tory to run in a crucial constituency remains a mystery.

"Take us to your leader"

TORY STORIES

MICHAEL Howard was delighted by the *Daily Express*'s splash on 13 April: "MIGRANT MADNESS... Labour's failure to secure Britain's borders was exposed yet again last night as police revealed how they were ordered to free a group of illegal immigrants."

Instead of being arrested, the migrants had been issued with a map and told to make their own way to a detention centre 80 miles away – after which they disappeared.

The news filled the whole of the first two pages, and an accompanying editorial rammed home the message that only Michael Howard could save the country from Labour's "chaotic" immigration policy. Tory propaganda chiefs couldn't have put it better themselves – which is hardly surprising, since although it carried the byline of home affairs correspondent James Slack, the entire story had in fact been emailed to him by, er, Conservative Central Office.

But where did the Tories get it from? Thereby hangs a bizarre tale.

The piece had originally been submitted to the paper last year by Alun Rees, a former *Express* hack who now freelances in the West Country. It wasn't used; but when the election campaign started he decided to try again. Strangely, however, he sent it not to the *Express* but to Richard Shackleton, a Tory press officer.

"I needed a comment," Rees explained to the *Eye*. "I was going to try and freshen it up a bit." But his email to Shackleton says nothing about wanting a comment. "Richard. This story was filed but not used last summer," he wrote. "This has been said before but I think what gives it more power is that we have a named police officer and I do not believe the implications in terms of the creation of a faceless underclass of aliens has [*sic*] been described. Hope this helps. Alun Rees."

Shackleton, understandably delighted, promptly forwarded the piece to all the home affairs correspondents on his mailing list – including James Slack of the *Express*. And the very next morning Rees was astonished to see his piece on the front page, albeit under someone else's name.

"I just don't understand... My story was about six months old and needed more work," Rees told the *Eye*. "It was some sort of cock-up. But I think I'll go through the Tory party again – they got me a splash."

Any freelances who wish to follow his example and use Conservative Central Office as their literary agency should email spiked articles without delay to RShackleton@conservatives.com.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

THE leaking bucket that is Brussels' budget control system has sprung another leak.

Via the common agricultural policy (CAP), 40 percent of the £68bn that passes through European Union coffers each year already goes to support landowners, many of whom are quite wealthy. But according to a draft report from the European parliament's budgetary control committee, there is a serious problem over recovery of "irregular" payments.

These are made against claims that later turn out to be invalid; and the European court of auditors has discovered that, between 1971 and September 2004, irregularities totalled £2bn. These included the use of "false or falsified commercial documents", "trafficking in withdrawn or stockpiled products" and "falsified customs documents".

A procedure to retrieve taxpayers' money does not appear to be working very well. Of the total sum demanded, only 20 percent has been rescued from member states, according to the committee report.

It says that half a billion pounds is said to be blocked as a result of ongoing legal proceedings, while another £170m is regarded as irrecoverable. That still leaves more than £750m to be recovered.

The parliamentary committee highlights "sloppy" (financial) reporting in certain member countries, pointing the finger in particular at Spain, Italy and France. Spain accounted for almost half the total "irregular" losses but recovered only 9 percent of it. Meanwhile Germany, France and Spain are singled out for criticism for failing to report irregularities within time limits – normally a generous four years.

Number crunchings

£70,000

■ Amount David Blunkett has made from extra-parliamentary work since being forced to resign from cabinet

■ Rent he would have had to pay on his Belgravia home if Tony Blair had not allowed him to go on living there for free

Number crunchings

34,000

■ Number of asylum seekers who arrived in UK last year, prompting Michael Howard to demand a quota system

30,000

■ Number of asylum seekers who arrived in UK in 1996, the last year Michael Howard was in charge of the system

Electionballs

IN Holmfirth, Yorkshire, pensioner Norman Lee had to pay a £1.21 handling charge to pick up a mystery stamp-less parcel from his local post office.

Sadly, it was nothing more exciting than a leaflet from **Colne Valley** Tory candidate Maggie Throup, whose excuse to the local paper was that the stamp must have come off. The Royal Mail should make "stickier stamps", she said.

SPELLING is an issue for Ertan Hürer, Conservative, er, "parlimentary" candidate for **Hackney North and Stoke Newington**. His inability to spell his own job title might explain why his leaflet focuses so much on literacy and education.

Ertan Hürer - Conservative Parlimentary candidate for Hackney North & Stoke Newington

ONE Eye reader received a personally addressed Conservative party mailshot promoting the merits of Mark Pritchard, candidate for **The Wrekin** constituency, in Shropshire. Nothing wrong with that – but the reader in question lives in Beccles, Suffolk.

DURHAM Liberal Democrat candidate Carol Woods is having some difficulty with literacy here:

> **Carol Woods is fighting for no tuition fees and no top-up fees – university should be affordable for every student.**
> No one should be put off going to university because of the fear of debt.
> **Carol Woods wants to see school pupils taught by properly qualified teaher.**

LAUNCHING his party's regional manifesto, "Politics for the Peninsula", Conservative candidate for **Torridge and West Devon** Geoffrey Cox told supporters: "We mean to have value for money for the taxpayer, putting the money where it's needed most."

This is certainly a principle Cox follows in his professional life: he billed £1,035,342 in legal aid for his part in the Jubilee line fraud trial, which collapsed in March. His bill was £300,000 more expensive than that of any of the other nine barristers who were paid by the taxpayer, despite the fact that the trial collapsed before his client's case could be presented to the jury.

UKIP's candidate for **Putney**, Anthony Gahan, displays unabashed hypocrisy calling for an end to "unlimited EU immigration" in his election leaflets, while his personal profile notes "Anthony has lived and worked abroad for many years".

GIVEN that election flyers in **Newcastle upon Tyne East & Wallsend** were always going to read "Vote Labour: Vote Brown" – thanks to MP Nick Brown – you might have thought party apparatchiks would be keen to ensure that Tony Blair got a look in. However, it seems from the photo that in the north-east the idea that a vote for Labour is a vote for Gordon Brown as PM is expected to play well.

IN **Cardiff North**, desperate Conservatives were distracted from campaigning on the issues by a small cartoon on the Lib Dems' leaflet. They called in lawyers from 20th Century Fox to alert them to the potential copyright violation of a hand-drawn Homer Simpson.

MEANWHILE **Islington** Lib Dem Laura Willoughby is apparently on a recruitment drive for the Gay Police Association, with a photo caption inexplicably reading "Laura is fighting to out more police on our streets".

AFTER a spot of bother over wrongly sending out calendars to constituents in House of Commons envelopes earlier this year, **Croydon Central**'s standing MP Geraint Davies tried handing out electioneering material in person.

Unfortunately for him, the headmistress of Oval Primary School thought a middle-aged man handing out balloons by the school gate was somewhat dodgy behaviour and chased him off with a flea in his ear.

DAVID MORRIS, the Conservative candidate for **Carmarthen West and Pembrokeshire**, is busy parroting the party line that council tax revaluation is an underhand stealth tax that has destroyed public faith in the process.

According to his nomination papers, Morris lives in The Flat, The Conservative Club, Tenby – which suggests he's being a bit underhand and stealthy himself, as the Conservative club is a property on which, er, no council tax is paid.

IN **Gillingham and Rainham**, sitting MP Paul Clark's four-page leaflet mysteriously omits to mention even once the name of his party. Perhaps constituents are supposed to work it out from the slogans, but with text boxes in yellow, green, red and two shades of blue, it's headlines like "Thumbs up from private investors" which give the best clue to Clark's Tory, sorry, "new" Labour loyalties.

TORY Ben Redsell, standing for re-election to Norfolk County Council and supporting Paul West's parliamentary campaign in **Ipswich** was busy dealing with the subject of taxes last week – his own. Ipswich magistrates ordered him to pay more than £300 for not having a valid tax disc on his car.

NO ONE seems keener to parrot Michael Howard's anti-immigration stance than **Hammersmith and Fulham** Tory Boy, Greg Hands.

The candidate has just distributed a leaflet featuring a map of Africa helpfully coloured black, with the words "Action on Immigration" emblazoned across the top!

Hands appears to have form in this area having been investigated, though none too thoroughly, by Conservative central office back in 1999 following a complaint from the commission for racial equality.

GREEN candidate Siobhan Vitelli, fighting the **Tooting** seat, proudly describes herself as a freelance editor and proof-reader for environmental consultancies. It's a pity she didn't bring her skills to producing her flyer, across the top of which is emblazoned "Siohban Vitelli".

TV

The 2005 General Election (All Channels)

A MUCH-USED expression in the lexicon of spin doctors is "phoney war", a phrase reflecting the conventional wisdom that, in the week or so following the announcement of a general election, nothing much happens. But the problem for broadcasters in 2005 is that the phoney war lasted for at least the first two and a half weeks.

This was bad luck. Because most domestic news is generated by the government and the government goes into shutdown during a campaign, politicians have traditionally benefited from the fact that there usually isn't much else to put in the headlines. But this poll has notoriously coincided with a royal wedding and a papal death, funeral, election and inauguration, plus the closure of the Rover motor plant by its Chinese masters.

On strict editorial judgement, Blair and Howard wouldn't have commanded the headlines on more than about three nights so far. So, where the last election made Andrew Marr famous, this time the media figures the agents and publishers are fighting over will be "Sister Rita" and "Archbishop Vincent" and "Business editor Jeff Randall."

An additional problem is that a larger proportion of the audience than ever before would prefer that politics wasn't in the bulletin at all. Campaign '05 is the political equivalent of last year's FA cup final, which got the lowest viewing figures of all time. The reason was that the competing teams were Manchester United and Millwall. Many didn't tune in because they thought they knew the result; others because these two clubs are the most generally detested by those who don't support them.

Hence memos went out before the election at the BBC and ITV instructing that the coverage this time should "reflect the anger many people feel". That leads to roasting phone-ins and **The Paxman Interviews (BBC1)**, in which The People's Presenter practises the Kingsley Amis eye-popping of his late phase while treating the three main party leaders as if he were a magistrate faced with a burglar pleading not guilty after being caught carrying a bag marked "swag".

Paxo's interviews, which at least had the advantage of being high-level political theatre, were a perfect example of BBC balance in that all three politicians were treated with an equal level of incredulity but, in another way, this exacerbates the problem because Blair, Kennedy and Howard are not equally culpable for what has happened in the last eight years.

It has often been argued that "BBC balance" (a requirement imposed by law, which also

affects other broadcasters) encourages the impression that politicians are all as bad as each other and *The Paxman Interviews* risked this effect. So did Channel 4's **Why Politicians Can't Tell The Truth**, in which Peter Oborne catalogued various mendacities. Again, this was balanced in that the accusations were universal, but the effect is to seem to be advocating either apathy or anarchy.

Also showing the problems of the stopwatch approach to voting options is the much-advertised **Question Time Leaders Special (BBC1)**, in which in the closest we've ever got to a blokes-on-the-podium US-style candidates debate, the top trio will take questions from the same studio audience in successive half-hour segments. A nice idea is again hobbled by the requirement of balance because, under the electoral system we have, the Lib Dem leader simply doesn't merit the same length of questioning as the guys trying to become PM.

But the fear of viewer apathy has led most disastrously in recent elections to attempts to make the coverage "livelier" or "youth-friendly". The last couple of times this meant Ulrik-k-k-a or Mariella in black leather trousers interviewing a party leader but, in Campaign '05, quite horrifyingly, it has led to Brillo and Portillo prancing around in camp costumes during the opening titles of **This Week (BBC1)**, in a parody of "Is this the way to Amarillo?"

Apart from the basic rule that a parody of a parody is never funny, who in their right mind can have thought that the sight of Brillo doing a dance in this garb would have any possible effect on the electorate other than to switch over and stay away from politics for ever?

There are various proverbs around the world along the lines of "once you start to understand life, you begin to die". The tragedy for television is that, just as it got the hang technically and editorially of covering elections, no one was interested. The only hope for them is that the next election is likely to be a rare British instance of both candidates fighting their first campaign and this may generate more interest.

During the selection of Pope Benedict XVI, one commentator in the BBC's rolling news suggested that this was probably the last pontiff to be chosen by a cabal of secretive men in the Sistine Chapel: such is the trend towards democracy around the world that, next time, there will have to be a much more open process.

Good liberal thinking but, after three and a half weeks of ritualised clashes reported by broadcasters nervously certain that the audience has switched off, maybe Westminster should take a tip from Rome and the members of parliament should all just go to a hotel and come out to tell us when it's all over.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

BBC director-general Mark Thompson's 15 percent cuts at BBC News will have a direct effect on the quality of its output.

So says none other than Jonathan Baker, head of BBC World, writing in the Beeb's newsgathering magazine. With budgets cut by £2m so far, he predicts: "We'll face some difficult choices… deploying to locations much less frequently and sometimes only for high priority outlets such as the *Ten*."

So much for the BBC's remit as a public service news provider. Baker also reveals that: "We'll also need to take a close look at our coverage in Iraq, which has cost us £2m in the year just ending; we can't afford to sustain costs at that level in the year ahead."

This, of course, is good news for anyone in government who would prefer viewers to forget what's happening in Iraq. But it's bad news for everyone else.

The BBC is also happy to shed senior jobs in no-news areas like, er, Washington and Jerusalem. Too expensive, apparently. But they can still find the cash for box office smashes like the Michael Jackson trial, currently being covered by no fewer than ten BBC hacks (plus the radio bods) in sunny California.

WILL the curtain soon be brought down on Piers "Morgan" Moron's television career? Channel 4 chairman Luke Johnson certainly hopes so.

At a recent party given by PR man Matthew Freud, Johnson asked several fellow-revellers what they thought of the politics show on C4 which Moron hosts with another sacked editor, Amanda Platell. "Probably better for Morgan if I don't reveal precisely what Johnson thinks of him," wrote one guest, Richard Brooks of the *Sunday Times*.

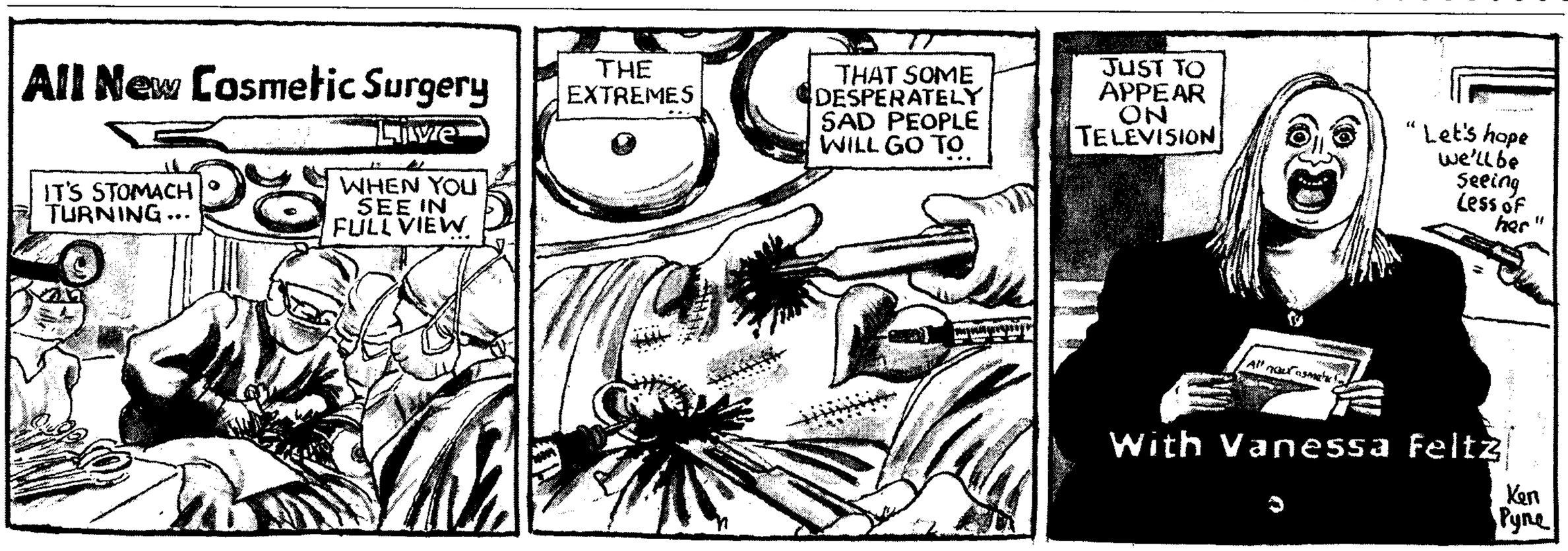
The *Eye* has no such inhibitions. "His politics show is terrible!" said Johnson. "Not only is it terrible, but no one bloody watches it. So what is the point of the programme exactly? As far as I can see there isn't one." And on that note, the ghastly Moron 'n' Platell show, with its average audience share of a pathetic 2 per cent, was consigned to the dustbin of history.

GOING LIVE

WHY did ITN News bother go live to reporter Romilly Weeks while covering the "excitement" of the Baftas?

"Earlier the street was full of the hundreds of people you'd recognise from your TV screen," reported a lonely Romilly in Drury Lane, long after all the "celebs" had traipsed inside the Theatre Royal.

"Romilly with all the stars there," said an unimpressed studio anchor.


All New Cosmetic Surgery Live
IT'S STOMACH TURNING...
WHEN YOU SEE IN FULL VIEW...
THE EXTREMES...
THAT SOME DESPERATELY SAD PEOPLE WILL GO TO...
JUST TO APPEAR ON TELEVISION
"Let's hope we'll be seeing less of her"
With Vanessa Feltz
Ken Pyne

MORE on Tony Maddox, CNN's senior vice president who shocked staff with his brutal email about unzipping "the body bag" for an unwanted TV producer, Elena Cosentino (see *Eye* 1128).

The *Eye* queried his non-appearance at Cosentino's London industrial tribunal, leaving the defence of CNN to his junior colleagues. But tongues are wagging at the TV news company over another case of Maddox absenteeism. For despite being appointed to his current post in October 2003, Maddox has not yet visited Iraq.

His absence is all the more noticeable since his predecessor, Eason Jordan, went to rally the CNN reporters and camera crews, working under dangerous conditions in the country, on many occasions. These included several visits after the end of the war when the region was at its most volatile.

Perhaps if Maddox had witnessed at first-hand the "body bags" produced by the ongoing Iraqi conflict he would have been less insensitive in his office communications?

EYE SKY

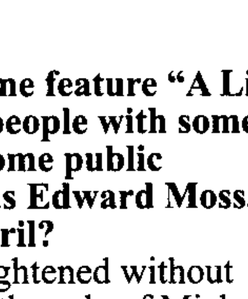
THE *Sunday Times* magazine feature "A Life in the Day" usually features people with some claim to fame, or at least of some public interest. But who on earth was Edward Moss, the featured subject on 17 April?

Mystified readers were enlightened without delay. "Moss has been playing the role of Michael Jackson in *The Jackson Trial*, the daily re-enactments of the child-molestation trial that go out on Sky News and Sky One from Tuesday to Saturday." Moss entered into the spirit of things by plugging a few more programmes made by the Dirty Digger: "When I get off work, my cartoons come on at 2am. I couldn't dream of missing them: *Futurama, Family Guy*..."

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What "h" is a common variety of bean used to make baked beans?
Contestant: Heinz.



Steve Wright In The Afternoon, Radio 2

Wright: In which direction does the sun set?
Contestant: North.

Family Fortunes, Challenge TV

Les Dennis: Name something people believe in but cannot see.
Contestant: Hitler.

James O'Brien Show, LBC 97.3

O'Brien: How many kings of England have been called Henry?
Contestant: Er, well I know there was a Henry the eighth... Er... er... three?

Church News

"ARCHBISHOP is the first to go to papal inauguration", said a large headline in Friday's *Times*, above a story which suggested that Dr Rowan "Grizzly" Williams's second trip to Rome in a fortnight was a portent of fresh ecumenical bridge-building between the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

Williams was indeed the first Archbishop of Canterbury to attend such an occasion since, er, the last time – the inauguration of the late John Paul II in 1978, which was attended by the late Donald Coggan.

The *Times* was not alone in billing the archbish as the first to attend since the Reformation; even the BBC carried it as a headline on Saturday. So where did the duff story originate? Why, Lambeth Palace press office, of course, which put out a release to the Press Association early in the week and had to publish an embarrassed retraction a couple of days later.

'Gargoyle'

LEGAL NEWS

TOP LAW firm Hammonds won a new contract last week as global legal adviser to SSL International, which makes Scholl footwear. A spokesman for the solicitors said SSL was "a good fit with Hammonds".

Perhaps an even better fit than he realised. One day later, Hammonds partner Ian Forrest sent the following email to staff at the Birmingham office: "Unfortunately we still have an individual within the office who is urinating in the footwear of female members of staff... These disgusting acts constitute gross misconduct."

SSL also makes Durex condoms. Might these be a solution to the problem? Alas, a spokeswoman for Hammonds refuses to discuss the subject. "This," she says, with splendid disregard for the nature of the offence, "is an internal matter."

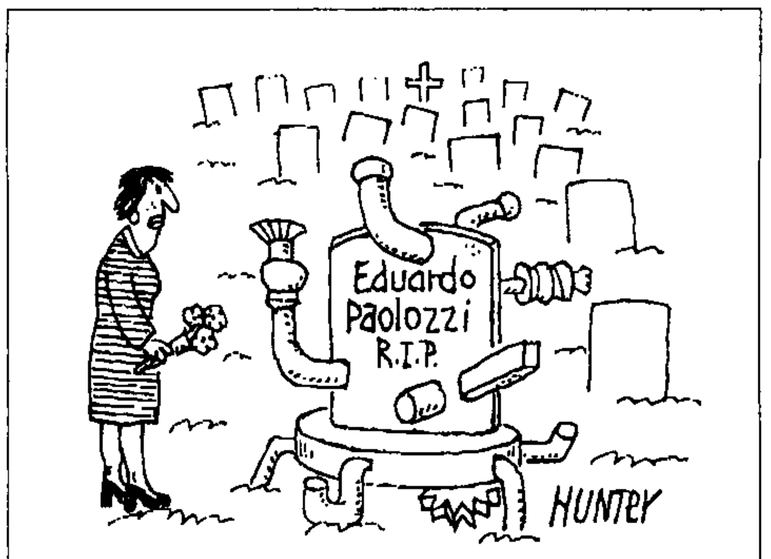
DUMB BRITAIN EXTRA

Question from original version of 'Ask The Family'...

Robert Robinson: This is one for the children of the family only. Which of these calculations gives the same answer:
(a) one half times one third;
(b) one half plus one third;
(c) one half minus one third;
(d) one half divided by one third?

Question from new version of 'Ask The Family'...

Dick and Dom: What breeds of dog do you have to cross to get a Labradoodle?



Warballs

- "There's a continued return to herbaceous planting, as the Gertrude Jekyll effect kicks in again as an antidote to the turbulence in the world. In war, you go back to the traditional – delphiniums, lupins, rudbeckias, cottage garden plants." – TV garden designer Diarmuid Gavin, *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*.

- "Sometime after 9/11 we realised that being enemies didn't make sense because we weren't competing – 9/11 was the catalyst that made Rob [Burgess, former Macromedia chief] pick up the phone and give me a call. We realised that we really don't compete, we complement one another." – Bruce Chizen, CEO of Adobe, on why he bought software company Macromedia.

- "Oscar-nominated actress Glenn Close has retired from Hollywood. The veteran star of *Fatal Attraction* and *Dangerous Liaisons* has announced that, in the light of 11 September, she is turning her back on blockbusters and the associated glitz. 'My priorities have changed since 9/11,' declares Glenn, 58. 'I prefer smaller films now'." – *Daily Express*.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Golf really is the new rock 'n' roll." – *Financial Times*.

"Gardening is definitely the new rock and roll." – *Essex Chronicle*.

"Domestic cleaning devices [are] the new rock 'n' roll." – *Observer*.

"Magic is the new rock and roll." – *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*.

"Is philosophy the new rock 'n' roll?" – *Irish Times*.

"Knitting... It's practically the new rock and roll." – *Sunday Express*.

"History is the new rock and roll." – *Daily Mirror*.

"Farming, it seems, is the new rock 'n' roll." – *Irish Times*.

"Classical music could even become the new rock 'n' roll." – *Grauniad*.

"If rock 'n' roll becomes the new rock 'n' roll..." – *Grauniad*.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

PETA ANGRY THAT J-LO PROUDLY WEARS FUR!
PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS
YOU'RE ACTING VERY BADLY!!!
PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL TREATMENT OF ANIMALS
I ALWAYS DO!
LATEST MOVIE

DOING THE ROUNDS

"BY 2008, all patients with suspected breast cancer will see a consultant within two weeks of referral by their GP," pledged Tony Blair last week.

This is similar to a previous pledge "that all patients *urgently* suspected by their GP of having breast cancer be seen within two weeks" and, according to the national audit office (NAO), this target has been reached in 99 percent of cases. Alas, 30 percent of patients who turn out to have breast cancer aren't suspected of having it, and so aren't referred urgently and wait up to 17 weeks to be seen.

Part of the problem is that cancer is often hard to diagnose, and if all women were seen urgently (as Blair now suggests), the system will go into meltdown (unless we farm it out to private companies staffed by overseas breast specialists). As it is, so much pressure and resource is directed at hitting the two-week target that the non-urgent referrals get sidelined.

An even more absurd side effect of this target culture is that treatment of established cancer may be delayed because of the need to see initial referrals in two weeks, many of whom don't have cancer. Delays in radiotherapy treatment have rocketed in the last five years.

It is also iniquitous for Blair to trumpet some cancers above others. They all deserve the same standard of care. Blair has also pandered to the women's vote by promising all women will receive their cervical smear results within seven days, but what about men? Prostate cancer is far more common than cervical cancer, yet only 22 percent of men with the disease are seen urgently (compared to 70 percent of women with breast cancer). Men with prostate cancer are also less likely to have a named nurse in charge of their care, have an informed discussion about side effects or be satisfied with their treatment. There is also a desperate need to fund further research into screening tests and treatment, but alas the prostate appears to be less of a vote winner than the breast.

MEANWHILE M.D. has discovered a new disease called HAIRS, or Hospital Acquired Infection Related Stress. The Tories started it with "I mean, how hard is it to keep a hospital clean?" (bloody hard, since you ask) and compounded it with distributing erroneous figures for MRSA infections.

Alas, the evidence-base for hospital-acquired infection is poor. We don't know if cleaner hospitals have less HAI, what the true incidence is and what treatment strategies work best. We do know that humans as a species are very dirty (half of us don't wash after urination, a quarter don't after defecation) and that much MRSA shedding comes from the skin of the perineum (between genitals and anus) and is not amenable to bedside scrubbing.

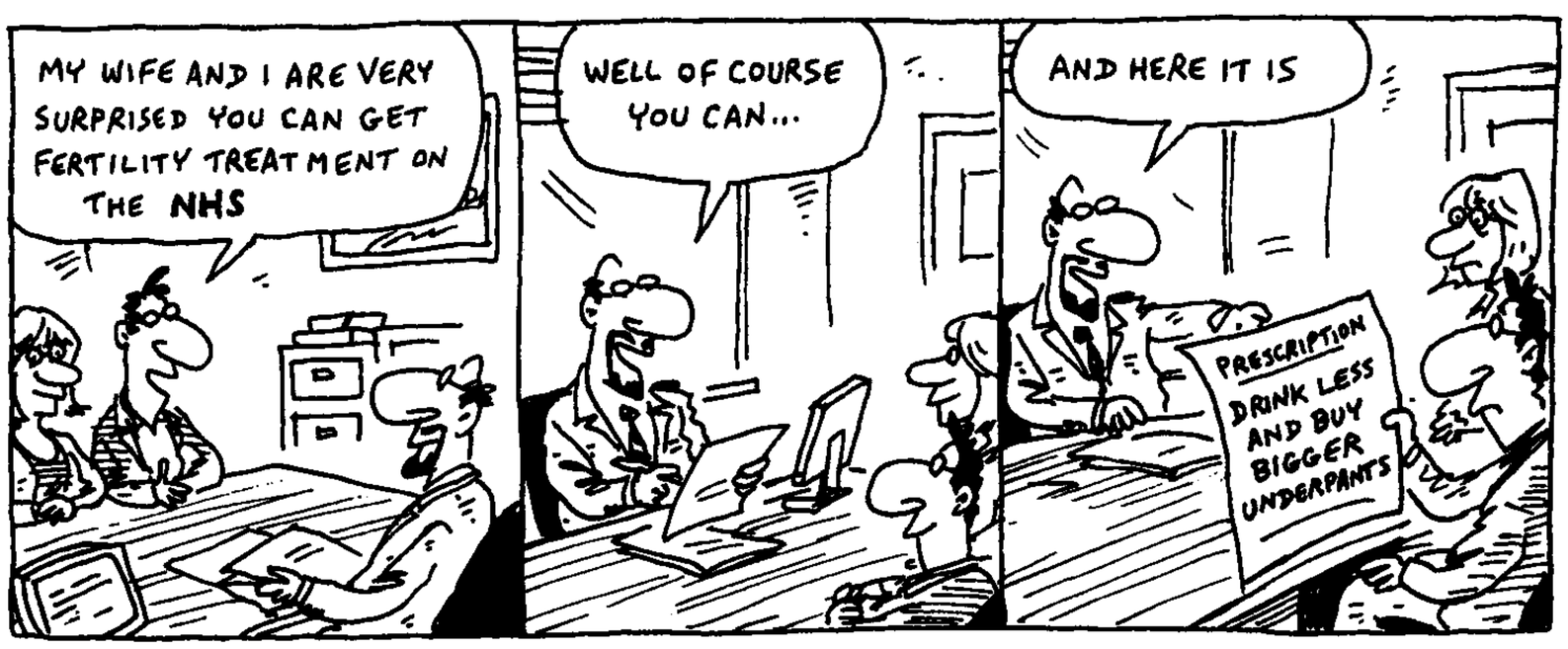
MRSA has been happily mutating since 1961 and will never be "cured", certainly not in hospitals with 100 percent bed occupancy rates moving patients and staff all over the place to hit spurious targets. Getting a grip on it needs a combined approach: hand-washing for everyone; restricting movement around the hospital; swabbing; isolation; research into the best disinfection, sterilisation, fumigation and laundry methods; and the judicious use of new antibiotics.

All this will take considerable resource and leadership, and will slow down the government's key treatment targets. So how many NHS chief executives and medical directors turned up to the Patients Association Cleaner Hospitals summit? Er… none.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


MY WIFE AND I ARE VERY SURPRISED YOU CAN GET FERTILITY TREATMENT ON THE NHS
WELL OF COURSE YOU CAN...
AND HERE IT IS
PRESCRIPTION
DRINK LESS AND BUY BIGGER UNDERPANTS

SIGNAL FAILURES

Beardie's lame ducks

VIRGIN Trains says it provides a "BMW service". But one man who knows the trains aren't up to scratch is… Richard Branson.

When the *Travel Trade Gazette* reported Virgin's airline ambitions in India, Beardie commented: "At the moment everyone in India travels on trains – which are even worse than trains in the UK – so it's ideally suited for a good domestic airline."

Branson speaks from experience. Billions have been thrown at his renewal scheme for Britain's west-coast mainline between London and Glasgow, yet Virgin's service is the least punctual in the country. Passenger miles plummeted as travellers sick of Beardie's Indian-style train service switched to airlines.

Virgin stands to lose out again when a five-mile extension of the M74 improves road access to Glasgow airport, which has many flights from London (but no Virgin flights). A public inquiry advised ditching the £500m project because of "serious undesirable results" for the environment, damage to the economy and conflict with the official aim of encouraging public transport. But Labour and the Lib Dems (two parties that claim to be concerned about global warming) at the Scottish Executive are pushing ahead. They were delighted to receive formal letters of support for the road from the AA, RAC and, er, Virgin Trains.

At least Beardie doesn't pretend to care about the environment. He told the *Independent on Sunday* that the next chancellor should provide new tax breaks for more North Sea oil exploration as "our fuel bills at Virgin are already £150m higher than last year". Perhaps he should have thought of fuel economy before specifying new trains for Virgin CrossCountry which are much heavier per seat than the trains they replaced.

Beardie also said he opposed Railtrack's renationalisation. His reason? "I do not believe in governments rescuing lame ducks." But does he also disapprove of the government shelling out huge emergency subsidy (£570m last year alone) to a struggling outfit called… Virgin Trains?

THE COMMUTERS
I'M SORRY, BUT THIS TICKET DOES NOT ENTITLE YOU TO TRAVEL
BUT THERE'S SEVERE DISRUPTION ON MY NORMAL ROUTE AND I'M DESPERATE TO GET HOME..
...IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN JUST JUMP INTO MY CAR AT THE TRAFFIC LIGHTS!
Grizelda

ON-TRAIN TV is all about attracting more people to the c2c and One franchises, according to National Express. But American financiers have been told a different story.

Why so many London commuters are angry about TV is a mystery, judging by One's description. Marketing director Martin Dean said the TVs would provide "news updates and other usual information" and gushed: "By providing added value and enhancements to the level of service available on our trains across London and the east of England, we can encourage more people to travel and help keep them informed at the same time."

He didn't mention advertising. But TNX Television Holdings Inc, the American company providing the TVs, told the financial community: "Since we recently announced that we had generated our first revenues from advertising, we expect that our enhanced marketing activities, in combination with growing penetration of the London market, will result in significant new advertisers using our unique vehicle to reach consumers."

One *Eye* reader wrote to One to complain about her imminent bombardment with ads from loudspeakers which passengers can never turn off or down. She was told only a small portion of the company's trains, those used between Shenfield and London, will be fitted with screens. That hardly squares with Dean's earlier boast about "trains across London and the east of England", and last year US-based Business Wire reported that TNX would install its "commuter television system on the company's entire fleet of trains".

National Express says passengers won't have to pay for the screens but hasn't promised to reduce fares, recently increased on c2c and One, to reflect the money it will get from the advertising. National Express needs that cash for itself: last year its rail profits increased by a miserly 76 percent to just £59m.

'Dr B. Ching'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

RED-FACE LANDS

THE three Labour councillors for the Redlands ward on Reading borough council were as shocked as anyone at allegations of postal vote-rigging in last summer's local elections.

In a letter to residents, councillors Riaz Chaudri, Peter Kayes and Gul Faraz Khan say: "It is unfortunate that the police have been unable to identify who was responsible in this case and that no prosecutions are expected."

Indeed. Forty-six out of 701 postal votes cast (7 percent) were dodgy, either because of concerns about the authenticity of witness signatures or because addresses and names on the electoral roll didn't match. The three write that there is no need to re-run the election because their majorities were such that any fraudulent votes could not have affected the result. So that's all right, then.

In the context it was probably unfortunate that the councillors' three "signatures" at the bottom of their letter were all clearly in the same hand. Cllr Kayes tells the *Eye* that they were actually "an electronic computer font". So that's all right, too!

INTO HYDER SPACE

IN JANUARY 2004 Milton Keynes council entered into a 12-year, £200m public-private partnership (PPP) under which Hyder Business Services – the company formerly known as Welsh Water – would run a whole raft of departments including finance, human resources, IT, transport services and housing maintenance. More than 700 staff were transferred.

Lib Dem council leader Isobel Wilson said it was "a great opportunity to bring in new investment, to dramatically improve the public's access to council services". Hyder promised "new work philosophies and practices... as well as the streamlining of business processes". But a report by MK council's auditors now reveals that Hyder has been conning the council by fiddling crucial "performance indicator" figures – leading to "the possibility that a deliberate attempt has been made to obtain payments not due under the PPP contract".

Auditors looked at what proportion of undisputed invoices were paid on behalf of the council within 30 days. Hyder's contract stipulates 90 percent should be paid – 10 percent more than the council managed to pay itself before the "partnership" began. Alas in January this year it had fallen to 47 percent – but even that pisspoor figure was "overstated" said the report. "Deeply concerning" practices were used to fiddle the figures, including not date-stamping bills, "deliberate falsification" of dates and inventing disputes.Senior Hyder managers were aware of what was going on, threatening those who expressed disquiet with the sack. One employee told auditors his superior "explained a range of ways... that I might keep my job. These included... changing business dates". The auditors found "a management culture where inappropriate practices are promoted by apparent threats of job security... these practices are not traced to 'maverick' staff but were a policy of senior management".

At least Hyder was even-handed. While hundreds of invoices were paid late, hundreds more were paid twice, according to a further auditors' report which has yet to be published. The largest sum was for £1.8m, with one bill for £3m about to be paid a second time when auditors stepped in. The council has recovered more than £2m in overpayments but has been left with a loss of about £30,000. The good news is that there was no evidence of fraud – just uselessness on a massive scale.

BERKS OF THE JOB

ANOTHER local authority "partnership" with private business that started with high hopes was that between Lib Dem West Berkshire council and Amey, the company that transformed itself in less than a decade from a moderately successful road-builder into a stock exchange basket case after getting in too deep with PFI contracts.

In 2003 it was gobbled up by Spanish construction company Ferrovial after entering into a series of loss-making deals. In 2002 Amey entered into a contract worth £168m over 10 years to run most of West Berks's admin, including finance, human resources, IT and payroll. Now the company has said it wants out, and 400 white collar staff who had transferred to Amey must wait to see if the council will re-employ them. It is thought that about 70 could find themselves out of work.

Council insiders say Amey shot itself in the foot by bidding too low and by being unable to pull off the usual privatisers' trick of driving down the pay and conditions of staff. In an economically buoyant town such as Newbury – headquarters of Vodafone – staff were hard to recruit at the wages Amey were offering.

Meanwhile West Berks chief exec Jim Graham has been nominated for a Rotten Boroughs Looking On The Bright Side award for the gloss he tried to put on the shambles last week: "The decision to go into partnership has always been viewed nationally as bold and creative, and the fact that the contract will not run its full term does not detract from the successes of the venture. The move has certainly been in line with best business practice of showing willingness to test innovative ideas wherever opportunities arise."

● SO FAREWELL, then, Alex Aiken, chicken-wrestling head of communications for Tory Westminster and Richmond-upon-Thames councils. Aiken – the former Conservative spin doctor who wrestled a *Daily Mirror* reporter dressed as a chicken to the ground during the 1997 general election – has stepped sideways from the Richmond job to make way for his almost equally unappealing deputy, Cormac Smith. This follows a series of *Eye* stories revealing how Aiken had run a campaign of bullying against a local independent community website which failed to toe the council line, during which he phoned the employer of at least one website volunteer in an attempt to pressure them to end their involvement. Aiken became a liability after Richmond council leader Tony Arbour was caught out lying about the affair in the council chamber (*Eye* 1126). A statement from Richmond says: "Alex Aiken will continue to work on specific marketing projects, helping deliver the communications contract." This is thought to be council-speak for "pulling the strings from behind the scenes".

BLACKIE MARK

RESIDENTS of the other Richmond, in North Yorkshire, were outraged when their district council decided to move its premises out of the town to an unused business park in Catterick, five miles away.

The move will cost £4.5m – nearly £100 for every council tax payer in the area – and will be funded by selling the old council buildings and two car parks to developers. If the proposed sale of the car parks goes ahead, it will stretch the town to breaking point when tourists arrive in their thousands for the summer. Though nearly 1,000 people have already registered their opposition to the move, the Conservative leader of Richmondshire district council, John Blackie, insisted that "the principle of an office move to Colburn Business Park is not up for consideration". No one is quite sure why – not least because the cost of renovating the existing Georgian buildings would be meagre compared to moving to Catterick.

Perhaps the answer could lie with the business park itself. In 2001, the regional development agency Yorkshire Forward spent £1.5m building the infrastructure of the park and promised that "more than 400" jobs would be created. Nearly four years later a grand total of zero businesses has moved to the site, creating no jobs at all. The whole affair has been very embarrassing – not least for the district council, Yorkshire Forward and Regional Assembly member who worked so tirelessly to promote it. His name? John Blackie, leader of Richmondshire district council.

● THE saga of the great Bath Spa millennium white elephant project – four years late and £20m over-budget – has long been chronicled in the *Eye*. As have the assorted cock-ups of outsourcing specialists Capita, which include the Individual Learning Accounts fraud fiasco, the Criminal Records Bureau shambles and the Congestion Charge. Now Bath & North East Somerset council (Banes) – recently branded "the most incompetent in Britain" by construction minister Nigel Griffiths – has sacked builders Mowlem and appointed a new company to manage the project... Crapita. Awesome!

BLIND FAITH

LEAST convincing excuse for a cock-up so far this year comes from a Camden council spokeswoman explaining why a new £10,000 public sculpture had misspelled the name of William Shakespeare.

The work, designed by Gustafson Porter, the architects responsible for the much-derided Diana memorial fountain in Hyde Park, consists of hundreds of coloured discs which spell out the "All the world's a stage" speech from *As You Like It* in braille – and attribute it to "Willim" Shakespeare. This is only apparent to the very small number of people who can read braille by sight, however, as the text is covered with glass, so it can't be touched by the blind. The Camden spokeswoman said: "The artist's original idea was for it to read as braille. But we didn't think that was a good idea as you have to touch braille to read it, and it's not good to have people touching a public piece of art. So the work is just inspired by braille, but it's not intended to be read as braille. It's just a random collection of discs really. It's not going to be corrected because it's not meant to be read as braille." We, er, see.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

FOCCACIA... CIABATTA...
PAIN DE CAMPAGNE... RYE... SOUR DOUGH...
BAGUETTE... PAIN D'EPICE...
PANE TOSCANA... GLUTEN FREE...
GREAT! COME ON, LOTTE! LET'S FEED THE DUCKS!

NOOKS and CORNERS

WHEN the *Sunday Times* ran a scare story that the government wanted to "dismantle" English Heritage and give its properties to the National Trust (a charity independent of government), culture secretary Tessa Jowell was swift to deny it.

"I have no plans to close the organisation," she wrote to EH chairman Sir Neil Cossons. "English Heritage is the lead body in the sector and does superb work in promoting and protecting our historic and built environment."

Elsewhere she has written that: "Britain's historic landscape, urban and rural, is recognised by those who live here and those who visit as one of its greatest cultural assets. We should be proud of it, and we should cherish it, and it is the duty of Government, whether in London, Edinburgh or Cardiff, to protect and promote it for everyone."

But "new" Labour has odd ways of fulfilling that duty. In the five years since 2000-2001, funding for the Arts Council has risen by 53 percent and on museums, galleries and libraries by 36 percent – all very good. And on the historic environment? English Heritage received a rise of 2 percent over the same period which, with inflation, represents a *cut* in real terms. And sport? Oh, a rise of 98 percent.

Worse is to come. In December Jowell announced a 6.3 percent cut in EH's funding over the next three years, which will require £14m worth of economies and less money to help repair listed buildings. The plain fact is that this government has shown no active recognition of the importance of historic buildings and couldn't care less. Believe it or not, things were better under Mrs Thatcher.

Jowell has also come up with a brilliant wheeze to deal with the problem of wretched listed buildings that get in the way of masterpieces by fashionable superstars. In *An Essay on the Historic and Built Environment*, she is concerned with modernising the system of heritage protection and sees a role for new technology. "It is inevitable that some buildings from the past will be lost, and lost forever," she writes. "This is a high price to pay but it does not imply that we lose all of their heritage [*sic*]. I think technology may suggest a way of dealing with this. Digital photography and cinematography now make it relatively easy – and increasingly affordable – to create a perfect 'virtual' moving image of a building, inside and out... Imagine applying the same technology to a listed site under threat of demolition."

A good record of a lost building is better than nothing. But, given development pressures, it would soon be a short step to suggesting that it wouldn't matter if a listed building goes as it can still be appreciated on a screen. To be fair, Jowell says that "there is no substitute for the real thing" in heritage matters; but even to float this idea shows a total lack of understanding of why people can be so passionate about preserving old buildings in the landscape.

Surely listed buildings should be protected and the new digital technology could be used to preserve "innovative new design" as virtual reality. After all, the masterpieces by Will Alsop, Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind and the rest are all conceived on screen by computer-aided design these days, so shouldn't they just stay there like Sim City to be enjoyed on DVDs in the privacy of our homes?

LABOUR, new or old, cannot leave anything alone. London mayor Ken Livingstone has a public spaces programme which seems to mean unleashing fashionable architects at great expense on perfectly agreeable open spaces.

Milord Foster, for instance, is going to revamp Parliament Square (incorporating defences to protect precious MPs). But the pilot project is to be Sloane Square, which the royal borough of Kensington 'n' Chelsea wants to make safer and more attractive. At present, the centre of the square is a sort of oasis surrounded by traffic, decently paved after the Second World War, with a war memorial, a statue of Sir Hans Sloane and a fountain by the sculptor Gilbert Ledward. Modest and vaguely continental in character, it works well with the eclectic mix of buildings round the perimeter.

But not for much longer. The modish firm of Stanton Williams is going to replan the

square. There will be a "dramatic surfacing arrangement of granite sets", raised granite plinths with water running over them, lighting set into the paving and "water jets" which will "bring a more playful character to this busy pedestrian area". So, instead of simply being able to walk or sit down, pedestrians will be tripping over granite plinths and soaked by jets of water.

The real explanation for all this is the "more inventive" road layout which is proposed. Instead of a gyratory system, the traffic will go straight across the middle of the square, leaving smaller paved areas either side. And on the eastern side, the Royal Court Theatre can then extend its outdoor café. How useful for the theatre, one of whose trustees is Alan Stanton's old boss, Milord Rogers, who still labours under the tired old fantasy that London should be more like Barcelona. Such is modern "urbanism".

English Heritage has rightly condemned this scheme. Indeed, if the borough really cares about traffic, all it has to do is ask to have Sloane Square included in the congestion charge zone.

'Piloti'

"One piazza with extra topping!"

I-SPY *Poster, Taunton Railway Station*

Submitted by Brian Hennessey. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHAT is it with the arts in Scotland? Any mention of creative culture north of Carlisle these days and you get a re-enactment of the Battle of the Braes.

Scottish Opera, as reported here, has been almost terminally raped and pillaged by the philistine Scottish Executive and is preparing to go dark until the summer of next year. And the Edinburgh International Festival is threatening to go under too, after a drop of £500,000 in box-office revenue between 2003 and 2004 and news that a £600,000 rescue package scraped together by the city council and executive won't be enough to keep the show on the road.

Festival director Brian McMaster has a crisis meeting with the executive this week at which he'll beg for more. But word is he won't get it. And the only other prospect for salvation – a straw-clutching idea for the council to impose a special summer festival tax on hotels and casinos – is being denounced by every political figure with an eye on the future. Money for the arts? God help us no.

Then there are the Mr Angries in the world of Scottish composition: James MacMillan ranting at every opportunity about the mean, small-mindedness of Scottish nationalism and the sufferings of persecuted Scottish Catholics like himself; and now – a new entrant to the ring – James Dillon in a strop caused by the failure of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra to glorify his genius.

Mr Dillon, for the many who will not have heard of him, is a formidable and prickly character: a darling of the international contemporary avant-garde who writes impossibly obscure and complex music of the kind that very serious people with moustaches listen to in Donaueschingen or Darmstadt. It's a touch de trop for British audiences, which is why he doesn't get performed here. But the other week the RSNO took on one of Dillon's big scores, Via Sacra, in a Glasgow concert intended for broadcast by the BBC.

Unfortunately the players didn't think much of it (one was seen to yawn as it started) and, in any event, couldn't make any sense of the score, which they seemed to be reading with incomprehension. The performance was a shambles and the broadcast was quietly dropped. But not so quietly the composer spent the next two days complaining bitterly to anybody who would listen that the orchestra was lazy, uncommitted and worse, and that the conductor Alexander Lazarev was no better.

Perhaps he wouldn't have been happy anyway. Before the concert Dillon gave a talk in which he told the audience that orchestras belonged in a museum and conductors were a waste of time. Not the most diplomatic way to get the RSNO onside.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

Down on the Farm

YET again the farming press is full of horror stories about the chaos engulfing the Rural Payment Agency. This is the body which employs 3,000 officials to dole out subsidy cheques to farmers under the EU's common agricultural policy, the system whereby UK taxpayers send £5bn a year to Brussels, which then hands back £2.5bn for UK farmers, while passing on the rest to more worthy recipients, such as Greek tobacco farmers or the owners of non-existent Sicilian olive groves.

In February it was reported that, thanks to yet another computer failure, thousands of farmers still owed money due in December were not likely to receive their cheques until March. This is the kind of familiar shambles which leads to Brussels wearily imposing yet another fine of 14 million euros – paid by the British taxpayer – leaving the farmers to gaze sadly at the agency's mission statement (our aim is "to be a customer-focused organisation that pays valid CAP claims accurately and on time"), while trying to think up some new way of convincing the bank manager that "the ministry cheque really is in the post".

How different things are in Hungary. When the ministry failed to pay out 90 percent of the EU subsidies due last December, a vast army of farmers from all corners of the country converged on Budapest with 900 tractors, which they parked in the centre of the city, bringing traffic to a halt and refusing to move until the money was paid.

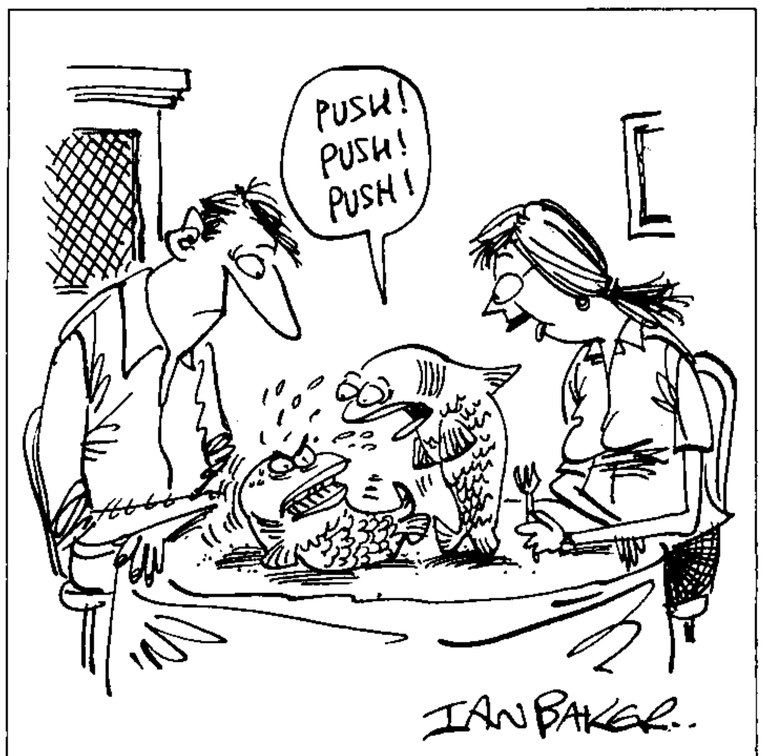
Now the Rural Payments Agency is again in the doghouse for the shambles it is making of arrangements for the EU's new single farm payment scheme. By 16 May every farmer must register the exact land-area of his farm to qualify for payment. But this has thrown up so many unforeseen problems and queries that, despite the agency doubling the staff at its call centre and hiring dozens of extra "map editors", the whole programme is running weeks late. Yet if any farmer is a day late with all the information required, he can be penalised by losing all his payments, which should suit Brussels and the treasury very nicely.

At a recent angry confrontation between the NFU council and Johnston McNeill, the hapless official who runs the agency, one delegate stormed: "The industry is bloody livid about the lack of competence that is being demonstrated by the RPA." If they were Hungarians, of course, they would long since have closed down London with a few thousand tractors. But being British, they will probably just write an aggrieved letter to the *Farmers Guardian*.

THE GREAT Lord Haskins, millionaire chief adviser to the Beloved Leader on farming matters, certainly set the hives a-buzzin' with his sermonising on the Today programme about how Britain chucks away £29bn-worth of food each year (equivalent to £420 a head).

In quantity terms, probably the main culprits are the supermarkets, with the mountains of perfectly edible food they send for landfill because it has passed its "best before date". What neither Haskins nor the Today programme were too anxious to remind listeners was how much of the Haskins fortune was based on his years as chairman of Northern Foods, supplying supermarkets with a good deal of that produce which ends up in a hole in the ground.

'Muckspreader'



"This is the freshest caviar we've ever had!"

HIGH PRINCIPALS

BOSSES at a nursing college told staff to send a fellow lecturer to Coventry after he was reported as claiming that the only admissions requirement for nursing students was "breathing".

Les Storey, principal lecturer in the business development unit at Preston's University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), told a Royal College of Nursing conference that his colleagues were under so much pressure to "fill places" on nursing courses that all they ask of applicants is: "Are they breathing? Can they sign their name?"

The comments, in a debate at the RCN conference in London in February, were reported in the *Nursing Standard* magazine in March. Storey, who has since claimed that his remarks were reported out of context, called for a reduction in the overall number of nursing students and for an emphasis on the quality of future nurses.

Following the article, nursing department chief Dr Bernard Gibbon sent an email warning academic staff not to associate with Mr Storey. Gibbon's email claimed that "our good name has been brought into disrepute by Les Storey" who had "gone off on a frolic of his own and will be held to account for bringing us into disrepute".

He continued: "In order that you cannot be misquoted, or misrepresented I have requested that Les not be permitted to enter the department of nursing without my prior approval and I am requesting that you do not meet with him to protect your own position."

Storey helped to develop NVQs in nursing and in 2000 was given a fellowship of the Royal College of Nursing. The nursing department at Preston admitted almost 800 students last year as the UK struggles to meet a huge nursing shortage. To take a BSc in Nursing, applicants need five GCSEs or an NVQ Level 3 in "Care".

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

THIS summer 1,500 child athletes will arrive in Coventry for the International Children's Games, presumably delighting culture secretary Tessa Jowell, who last week promised to "take competitive sport in schools to a new level".

Meanwhile at the city's Howes Primary School more than 40 homes are to be built on the sports field.

A new 210-pupil school is to be built in the grounds of the current school building, which will then be demolished. A green "living roof" of small plants on the new building will apparently help to control temperature and rain run-off – while the grassed areas around the school give way to lucrative new housing.

Coventry council planners gave permission to Stamford Homes for 42 new properties, ranging from one bedroom flats to four bedroom houses, some of which will stand on the land where the old school was and some on the remaining playing fields.

There will still be room for two sports pitches, but Sport England says that some houses will be just 12 metres from them (with their garden boundaries even closer) which could lead to restrictions on when and how often the pitches can be used, to avoid noise nuisance.

Plans for a health centre on another part of the school site have been withdrawn by local health bosses, and the council may allow yet more homes if no other community or leisure uses are proposed soon.

CAN is an established and thriving agency providing a range of drug, alcohol and homelessness .throughout Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

Advert, Milton Keynes News

RUBBISH UPDATE

THE cross-party parliamentary sustainable waste group's (PSWG) "producer responsibility project" is not merely sponsored by the waste disposal giant Biffa: but the money openly comes from the company's landfill tax credits funds.

Biffa, part of Severn Trent plc, has £14m in tax credits to distribute each year through the so-called Biffaward. Landfill tax credits are supposed to fund environmental or local community improvements near landfill sites. So it's hard to see how a talking shop at which MPs and business leaders try to forecast the impact of new laws that make producers of vehicles and electrical goods responsible for their eventual disposal meets those criteria.

Fellow sponsors of the group Sony and Electrolux, who are soon to find themselves responsible for huge amounts of waste electronic gadgetry, can hardly be considered disinterested parties either.

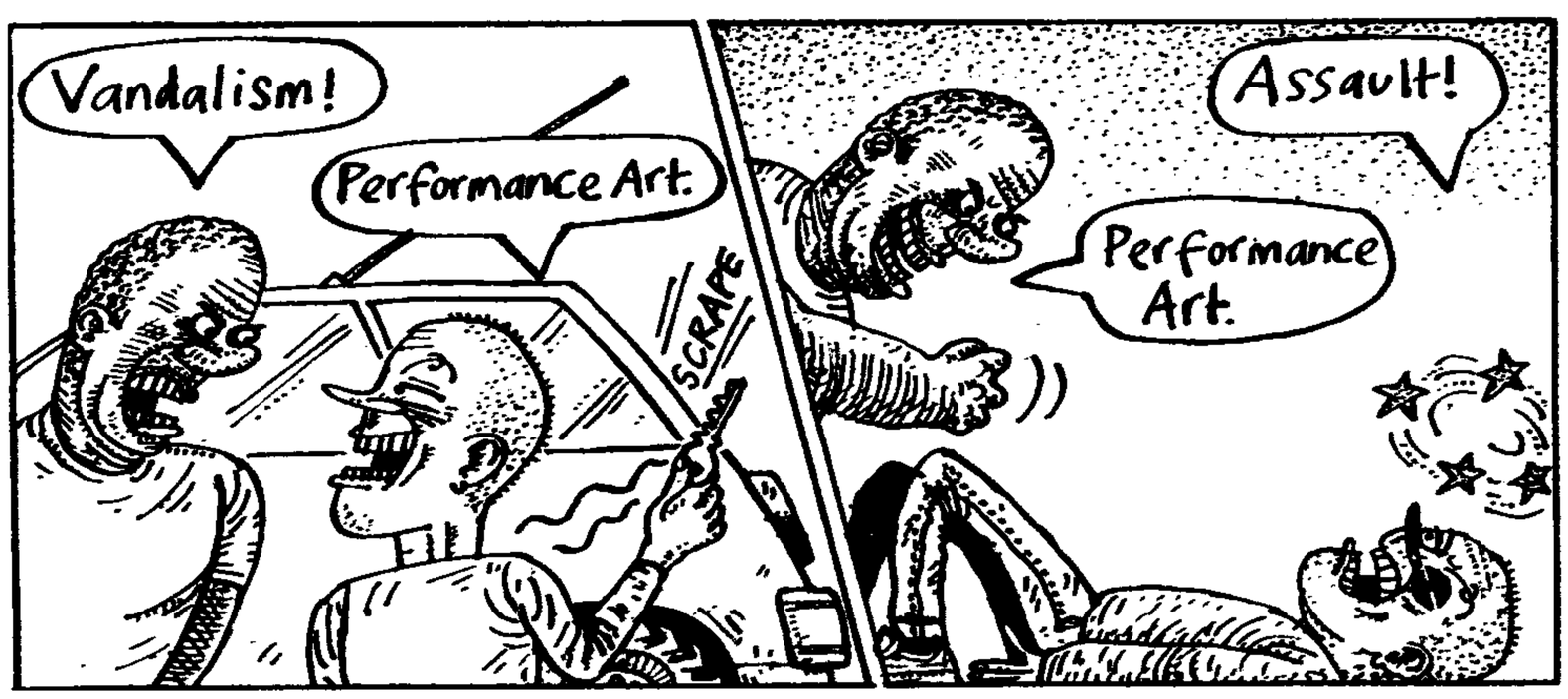
LUVVIES

"My self-administered enema [on the TV show 'Celebrity Detox' in 2003] demystified me; that's why I did it. There was something very liberating about it."

KIM WILDE
***You* magazine**

Submitted by Nigel Pearson.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS — BY BIRCH



Letters

Missing manifesto

Sir,

Just thought you might like to know that I took a trip to the campaign headquarters of "new" Labour chairman Ian McCartney today to pick up a copy of the Labour Party manifesto. Unfortunately, I was told that they didn't have any...

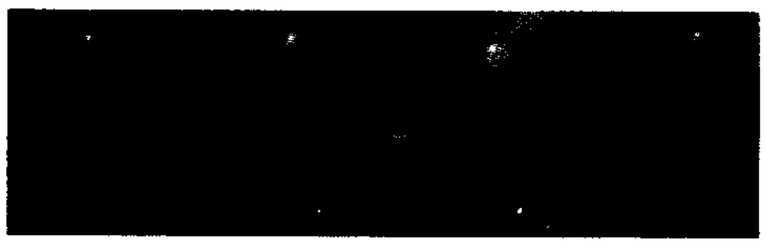
I then tried the town hall, no joy; then the reference library where I was told that they were getting them but it would be after the election.

Are you thinking what I am thinking? Probably. But the town hall and library didn't have any of the other manifestos either. I spent a whole hour actively trying to find a copy of them. How are people who aren't active supposed to see them?

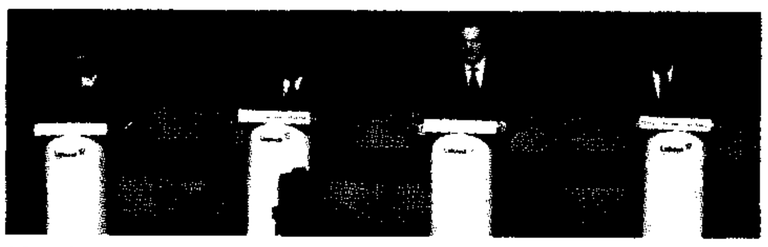
SAMUEL BLAKEMAN,

Via email.

Lookalike



Labour Party



Kraftwerk

Sir,

I couldn't help noticing the similarity between the Labour Party and German band Kraftwerk. Are they related somehow?

Yours sincerely,
GARY WILLIAMS,

London N4.

French letter

Sir,

Will Holloway's letter in issue 1130 "That sinking feeling" attempts to draw some sort of similarity between Michael Howard (leader of the Conservative Party) and Jean Marie Le Pen (a bigot and racist!)

All political groups have their share, unfortunately, of people with extreme views. George Galloway used to be a member of New Labour for example. I myself am a Conservative voter – albeit a left-wing Tory – but like Mr Howard I am Jewish. To even joke about making a connection between a conscientious law-abiding sincere British MP and an odious French man proud of his racist views is appalling.

MICHAEL PERRY,

Baildon, W. Yorks.

Checks in the post

Sir,

Read your piece on postal voting re: Tooting with a chuckle having just the other day received a letter from Charlie Kennedy asking me to complete an application form and return it to the Lib Dems. Small world!

ROBERT WHITTLE,

Manchester.

Dry riposte

Sir,

Thank you for repeating the advice on metering and flexible payment plans that WaterVoice has given to water consumers in England and Wales (1130). It is all valid, and – sadly – all that is within our power to do, now that the industry regulator Ofwat has taken final decisions on how big the increase in water bills will be for the next five years.

But how could Private Eye have missed everything else that we have said, loudly and publicly over the last year, including:

"The planned increases are neither affordable nor acceptable"; "...sharp increases for water and sewerage could be the last straw. They could push thousands into debt to their water company for the first time"; "it is now time for action to introduce help to reduce charges paid by the poorest customers, and to ensure that assistance is offered to those on low incomes..."

So it's not a fair cop to say we haven't defended consumers. Far from being a washed up watchdog, we intend to carry on barking and biting as well as providing practical advice to consumers.

Yours sincerely,
MAURICE TERRY,

WaterVoice Chairman.

Argument demolished

Sir,

Re Nooks, 1130. The houses being demolished in Stockton-on-Tees at this time were only built in the mid-1950s. These are not terraced houses but semi-detached and blocks of four or five, two, three and four-bedroom houses. They have bathrooms, central heating and in a lot of cases double-glazed windows; all have gardens and parking spaces for vehicles.

This gives a life span of less than 50 years, hardly time for the plaster to dry. As your article says, they are to be demolished under the renewal initiative scheme to make way for more three and four-bedroom houses, obviously more to the acre than before, which is the most likely reason.

The older people on this estate were turfed out of their terraced houses in the town when these houses were built, most people were happy in the town terraced houses but still were forced to move, we were to have a bathroom, central heating etc. We were encouraged to buy these properties in the 1980s, and many people did, and since then improved them to include double glazing etc.

If these properties were in the south of England they would be worth over £100,000 and no council would dare to suggest knocking them down, but in Tony's heartland anything goes, and the southern council taxpayers pay for it.

MR R. PICKERING,

Stockton-on-Tees.

Lookalike

Julian

Anne

Sir,

I couldn't resist sending you this photograph of Anne Milton, the Conservative candidate for Guildford. I am sure that they printed a picture of Julian Clary by mistake.

Best regards,
TONY OWEN,

Via email.

Election special

Sir,

I was delighted to see a group of young women engaging in politics on BBC One's This Week, especially as they were engaging with an elderly man. Is there a history of this?

Regards,
WOODY PHILLIPS,

Via email.

Get a life

Sir,

You describe the judgment of Richard Mawrey QC on the ballot fraud in the editorial as coruscating (to give forth flashes of light; sparkle and glitter). I have no doubt that his judgment is of the highest form of jurisprudence but don't you mean something along the lines of scathing (to criticise or denounce severely; excoriate).

I can't believe I'm bothering about this, I must be getting old.

Best regards,
WILLIAM SCHOFIELD,

Via email.

Body armour

Sir,

Delighted though I was to get a mention in your mag, especially as it brought more feedback from friends and fellow hacks than any other name-check I have ever received in my "lucrative" career as a body language expert, but I do need to finally justify myself after my monstering from your Street of Shame column in the August 2004 issue of Private Eye.

You brought me to task for stating in the Mail on Sunday that Kirsten Dunst and Jake Gyllenhaal signalled a "high degree of commitment" in their body language despite the fact that Associated Press reported four days earlier that they had ended their romance.

As I do so hate to be wrong about anything I am enclosing today's press cutting from the Sunday Times with an enormous amount of glee. This announces that the pair faked their split last year and are now about to marry.

The world of celebrity gossip is a complex one and Private Eye is obviously way too intellectual to keep up with the subtler nuances. Bitter? Moi? Of course! A huge printed apology please or I shall slag off The Gnome's body language at the nearest opportunity.

Warm regards from an otherwise devoted fan.

JUDI JAMES.

Last words

Sir,

I would be interested in any feedback or creative ideas for disposal of unwanted library stock.

Skips full of books destined for landfill do not seem to go down well with the public/press/politicians.

Ongoing book sales can be a slow process and can detract from the image of the library. Larger occasional sales can be staff and time intensive and require a good location, publicity, transport and storage.

Other institutions, charities and booksellers are not always keen on standard library discards.

Sales of older more collectible items can attract disapproving publicity in the local press (and current editions of Private Eye).

We are using a recycling collection group but the local cooperative charge per bag with a double charge if hardback covers are not torn off.

All thoughts welcome.

NIGEL IMI,

Professional & Collections Manager, Jubilee Library, Brighton.

Lookalike

PM

Lemur

Sir,

I was hit by the astounding similarity between the endangered Aye-aye lemur recently born in Bristol Zoo and our "aye" seeking endangered PM. Any relation?

Yours faithfully,
ANTHONY ZAPPALÁ,

Via email.

Library duty

Sir,

Professor Graham Richards's erudite letter (Eye 1130) about wonderful books discarded by Brighton Library must have had the editors of the Times Literary Supplement and London Review of Books looking at your columns in envy.

Who knows what other great ex-Brighton books lurk in such places as Quinto's bookshop? After buying £170 worth of art books for 30p at a Library sale and continually enjoying these, I felt aghast that they are not available to everybody. This made me apply under the freedom of information act for a list of books discarded by Brighton libraries over the past three years. I was duly informed that no records are kept. The end of history indeed. With books going rapidly out of print, a first duty of libraries is to keep them available, not to ape bookshop fads.

Yours etc,
CHRISTOPHER HAWTREE,

Hove, Sussex.

Toad in the hole

Sir,

I was delighted by your delicious comparison of myself and Kermit the Frog though I'm not so much green as prison grey. I also felt the description of me as "a revolting old toad" was one of the most accurate and flattering I've received in several years. Thank you so much for caring.

JONATHAN KING,

Via email.

Back to the closet

Sir,

Your piece on Jonathan King's legal adviser Giovanni di Stefano reminds me of my one encounter with King.

Many years ago, working on a music trade magazine, I happened to repeat a New Musical Express gossip item about King being seen gambolling with a young boy in the back of a limousine at Crystal Palace Bowl during a concert. King happened to be friends with the publisher, and made a half-jokey threat of legal action, but obviously didn't want to pursue it for fear of further exposure. His arrogance on his recent release from prison proves he hasn't learnt anything – modesty, humanity, compassion – in the past quarter century.

As a queer myself, I am heartily tired of being associated with sleazy creatures like King. Why doesn't he just fuck off back into the closet?

JOHN GILL,

Andalucia, Spain.

Royal visitor

Sir,

I was surprised to see the Eye accord the Visitor of the University of Wales Swansea the underpowered description of "a kind of ombudsman". As any student unfortunate enough to have actually encountered their institution's full regulations will testify, the Visitor of almost every British university is actually Brenda; while the gentleman acting on her behalf undoubtedly fulfils the ombudsman's role, he is an appointee of the Privy Council.

Yours pedantically,
GARETH AUBREY,

Manchester.

Lira delirium

Sir,

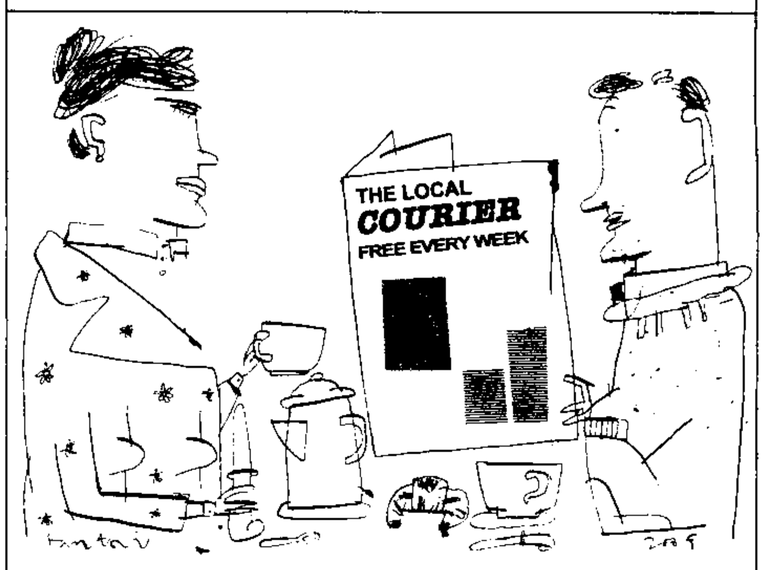
An obvious one, I know, but Brussels Sprouts (Eye 1130) has clearly spent far too long on the gravy train and has picked up some nasty habits. Currently, 2.41 TRY (Turkish Lira) = 1.00 GBP. Therefore, 5,000 Turkish Lira IS about £1,700, but 40,000 IS NOT £8,500. It is actually about £13,700. Perhaps Brussels Sprouts has been using Gnomex Travel Services for his expenses float?

I will not be cancelling my subscription forthwith, but will be checking my direct debit very carefully!

ANDREW PAPAS,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Here's an interesting story...:

Lookalike

Genghis

Galloway

Sir,

I wonder if anyone has noticed the similarity between "an outcast who created the biggest land empire the world has ever seen", General Galloway, and that very Respectful warlord Genghis Khan.

With Respect,
R. BENT,

Edinburgh.

Sylvie cringe

Sir,

Your Gnomeship, will you please pass on to the fragrant Sylvie Krin that any fule kno that Edward VII (nasty old git) was Charlie Windsor's great-great-grandfather.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY,

Halesowen.

Percentage for error

Sir,

In your last issue I received an "Amazing trial subscription offer!". Save 30% on the cover price it claimed. 10 issues for £10.

What a deal. But even more "amazing" maths. £1.30 – 30% = £0.91, £10/10 = £1. Are you trying it on?

If I had taken up your "amazing" offer, I would immediately be cancelling my subscription.

MICHAEL O'BRIEN,

London SW11.

● Apologies. Mr O'Brien is right. It's a saving of just 23.07 percent – but still a great deal. Ed.

No surrender monkey

Sir,

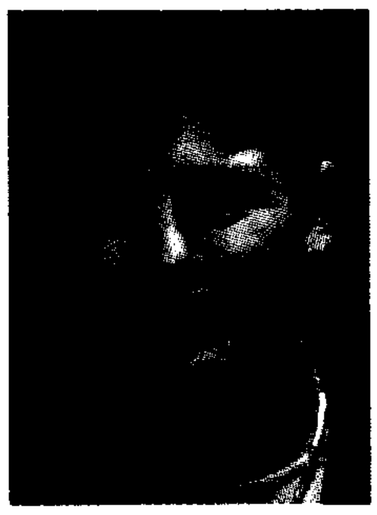
Please find attached a photo from the Pope's funeral. I have inserted the dialogue inexplicably omitted by the Independent.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID PROVAN,

Botley, Oxford.

Lookalike

Kelly



Doherty

Sir,

I wondered if your readers have noticed the resemblance between Education Secretary Ruth Kelly and tormented musician Pete Doherty, each of whom has ended up mixing with an unsavoury crowd.

Yours faithfully,
MATT LEWIS,

London SW17.

He has a point

Sir,

Samira al Morrin, she who explained the difference between the jilbab and the niqab, goes on to ask why all correspondents are not given "a free Private Eye pen... or can't you afford it?"

Whether Lord Gnome's financial clout stretches that far or not is between him and Ms Chevrolet, as are some other things no doubt, and thus not for me to say; but I do think that Ms Morrin is showing a little non-sartorial cheek here seeing as how she sent in her "letter" via email.

As I have sent mine in by good old Royal Mail, may I ask you for a free Private Eye computer?

Yours with a pencil and sharpener,
SIMON RICKMAN,

Wellingborough, Northants

Plane nonsense

Sir,

The information used by Dr B. Ching to support his diatribe against South West Trains (Eye 1130) is out-of-date. Thanks to a more realistic timetable and competent management by career railwaymen, SWT timekeeping has this year improved from "only" 77 percent to 90+. In the current issue of Rail magazine, Bournemouth-based SWT-user Barry S. Doe even nominates the company "Britain's best operator", relegating the popular GNER franchise to second place.

In contrast, during 2004, a mere 68 percent of flights arriving at or leaving Heathrow were within **fifteen** *minutes of schedule. Why doesn't your oriental doctor rant about that?*

Yours faithfully,
KEITH FARR,

Cholsey, Oxon.

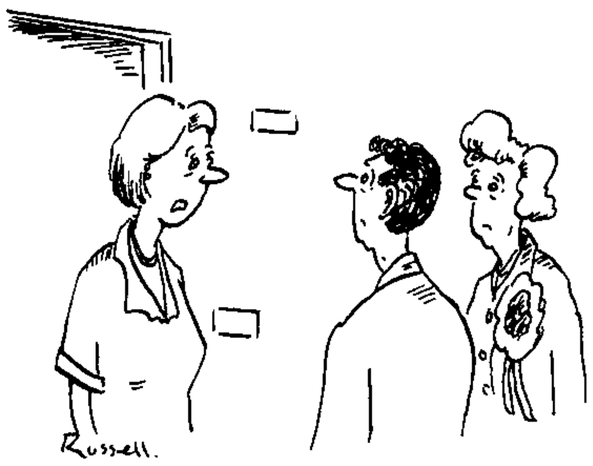
Hats off

Sir,

Although I am sure that none of Private Eye's readers think that the country of origin of the Panama hat is Luton (Dumb Britain, Eye 1130) there may be the odd reader unaware that the correct answer is Ecuador.

Yours,
WILLIAM CLAXTON-SMITH,

London N5.



"I'm using the postal ballot, so I honestly don't know who I'll be voting for"

A Beeb in his bonnet

Sir,

Despite my disdain for the justifications and apologies that flood into your letters pages, I had to write about the People's War piece.

Ok, the video might not be great and the project was probably far too ambitious at the time of conception, but I'm still surprised that the Eye printed a dishonest and inaccurate article taking pot-shots at a project that allows any of us to go online and not only read the stories of people who, for example, survived Japanese POW camps or the D-Day landings, but also communicate with them in the forums and compare their experiences with those who were children in the blitz, or the grandchildren of Axis soldiers. I find it to be moving and humbling stuff, and I defy any of your readers to say otherwise.

That the BBC needs to brand and explain its user-generated content [ugc] better (if you don't know what this is, Mr Murdoch has recently found out, so you will know soon enough) is not in doubt (especially if Eye journalists cannot understand the difference between this and its usual output). The attitude of many in the BBC that the public are idiots and it's a waste of money to help them publish their work, is sorely misguided, particularly as most of them will tell you that before going out to film an afternoon of lazy vox pops... In a few years' time we will all be used to blogs and ugc – the biggest mistake the People's War project made was realising that if they waited that long many of the contributors would no longer be with us.

Regards,
A BBC EMPLOYEE who doesn't work on People's War but thinks that it's a better use of the licence fee than Fame Academy...

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Princes: Canned Fish, Canned Meat and Sandwich Solutions" – *fish paste*

"Co-op Indian Style Meal Solutions" – *curry*

"Capita – the UK's leading provider of integrated professional support service solutions" – *computer cock-ups*

"Concord: a family of turnkey, automated, scaleable, software-based performance analysis and reporting solutions" – *timesheets*

"Macfarlane Group: passionate about providing total packaging solutions" – *cardboard boxes, pots, bottles and bags*

"Black & Decker: Powerful Solutions" – *tools*

"Aperture Solutions" – *windows*

"Chimtec Chimney Solutions" – *chimney sweep*

All submitted by readers

Lookalike

Thurso

Melchett

Sir,

Whilst browsing the website of the (entirely un)Real Alternative, Liberal Democrats, I couldn't help but notice the similarity between Shadow Transport Secretary, John Thurso MP and General Melchett of Blackadder fame.

I wonder if by any chance the two finely moustachioed gentlemen are related?

Regards,
JON HALEY,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Novo did well to get his body between himself and the ball."
JIM DUFFY, Radio Scotland
(Andy Crichton)

"There are big and there are big games. This is the latter."
Reporter, BBC Radio Bristol
(Martin Naughton)

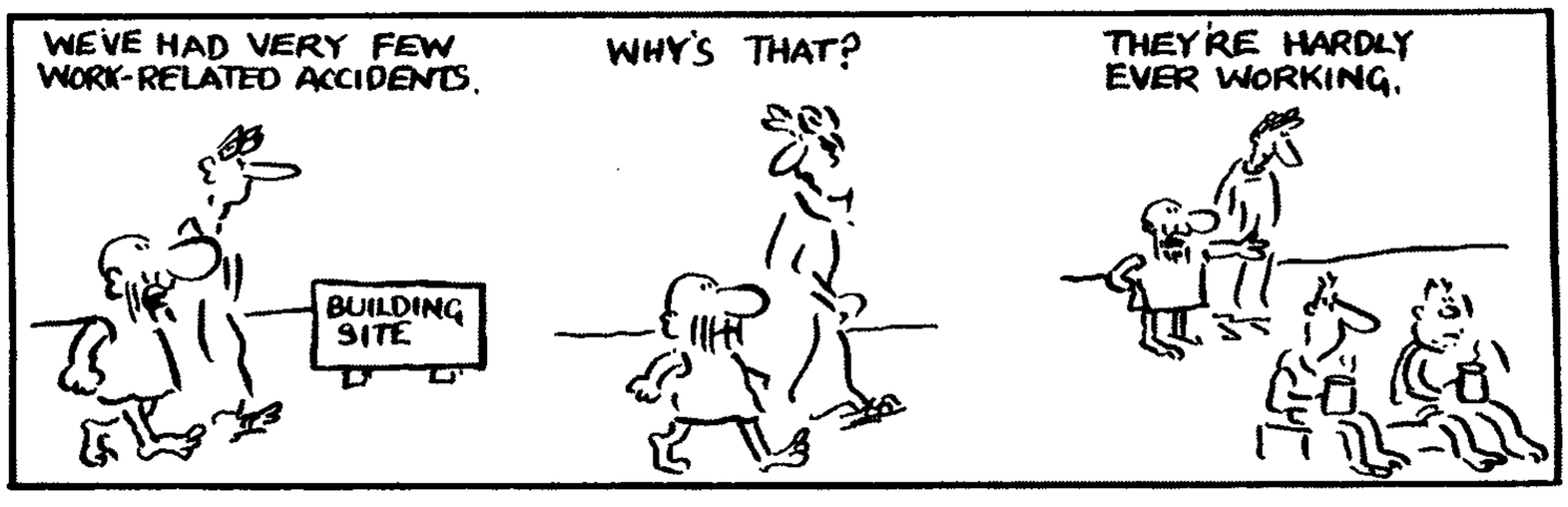
"He's a bit like a puppeteer because he's playing us all like fiddles."
RAY STUBBS, BBC
(Peter Keighron)

"Lampard put his shot in the bottom-hand corner."
GLENN HODDLE
(Michael Cox)

"He's making all kinds of hand signals but no one can hear him."
JOHN MURRAY, Radio 5 Live
(Michael Ofee)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from **Lomé**

from Our Own Correspondent

ALAS, poor Togo, tiny West African country ruled for 100 years and more by thugs from Germany, France and our own dear soil.

When the results are eventually sifted, last Sunday's elections will eventually deliver a new leader to follow our late, unlamented and extraordinarily ugly dictator, Gnassingbé Eyadéma, who died in mid-air of a heart attack in February on his way for medical treatment in Israel. The great "Guide" had been in power only since 1967.

Our politics reads like something between a Shakespearean tragedy and a Mexican soap opera. The choice of candidates was familiar indeed. There was the old boy's second son, Fauré, a 39-year-old business studies graduate. His main challenger? Emmanuel Bob-Akitani, a 74-year-old engineer and surrogate for Gilchrist Olympio, our veteran opposition leader. Olympio's father was Togo's first president – shot dead by then Sergeant Eyadéma in 1963.

Fauré was his father's anointed successor. Sadly, his elder brother Ernest, a senior army commander, had blotted his copybook as the alleged architect of a bungled assassination attempt against Gilchrist in 1993. But another brother, Kpatcha, is one of his closest advisers, while Rock, a further sibling, commands the army's very impartial and not in the least trigger happy "rapid intervention force". And there are plenty more: the late president laid claim to more than 200 children, born impartially from wives all over the country.

Gilchrist Olympio has his doubts over the enthusiasm of the forces of law and order, loyal to his family's nemesis, to protect his well-being and has lived outside the mother country for many years. Rules drawn up by the late president mean Gilchrist's lack of residency precludes him from standing. But his deputy enjoys the support of most opposition parties and claims an overwhelming popular majority. But it is unclear whether this will count for anything in a country that has not been troubled by free or fair elections since independence in 1960.

One ominous indicator – the European Union, which, despite France's disposition to indulgence, has maintained a principled stand, suspending aid for 12 years because of human rights abuses and election-fixing, refused to send observers. The Americans warned of the need for a "credible election", but we all know that the only really credible election would have been one in which Gilchrist was standing.

Some are bewildered by the departure of the Great Helmsman. For who could not be nostalgic for the old certainties we enjoyed under the brutish ex-French army soldier? Must it really be an end to the years of systematic intimidation and disposal of opponents, of secret police brutality, of bogus elections and simpering sycophancy from westerners, especially the French?

There have been promising signs, of course. The Gnassingbé family, backed by an ethno-military clique composed mostly of their own Kabyé people from the north, tried to hi-jack power permanently in the constitutional "coup" back in February. More lately, they have used control over the election apparatus and media – and a huge influx of funds from the old man's friends in Morocco, Gabon and Libya – to keep power at all costs. And you Brits, somewhat conspicuous by your absence, say Zimbabwe was dodgy. Welcome to the new Africa!

Our Kabyé brothers make up only 20 percent of the population, but the late president's tribe forms 80 percent of the security forces. With the prospect of the gravy train crashing into the buffers, they perhaps fear for their fate should Fauré fail. For the rest of us, though, it is not surprising that our spines were chilled by the vast picture of the defunct leader displayed at recent meetings of the ruling party with the caption: "I am always with you."

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The secret of my success is no socks – ever," ten-year-old Noah Nielsen told a press conference in Montpelier (Vermont), "along with not washing my feet for a week before the contest. These Adidas sneakers are three years old, and are held together with duck tape. I've played soccer and baseball in them almost every day since I had them, and I made the stink worse by rubbing my toes back and forth, to make them extra sweaty. My parents wouldn't let me wear them to school, but I've been wearing them every morning and evening for weeks, and I even sleep in them. It's dedication like that that's made me the champion I am today."

Nielsen was speaking after being awarded top prize at the 30th annual National Rotten Sneaker Contest in the US, which began in 1975 as a way to help a local sporting goods store in Montpelier sell shoes. The contest, which ranks entries according to the pungency of the stench, has been sponsored by Odor-Eaters since 1988. "Human feet shouldn't smell that bad," commented judge Bill Fraser after sniffing Nielsen's footwear, while judge Martha Tucker added, "Those are impressive, I'll just take a step back, because I may vomit." Judge Bill Aldrich said simply, "I didn't like that," before awarding first prize to Nielsen.

After winning a regional heat, Nielsen competed against dozens of other contestants from across America, and won when his shoes were selected by four judges, including an odour expert from NASA, and a black labrador. His prize was a $500 savings bond, a $100 cheque for new sneakers, and a year's supply of Odor-Eaters products. *(Gainesville Sun, 22/3/05. Spotter: Robert Harland)*

– o –

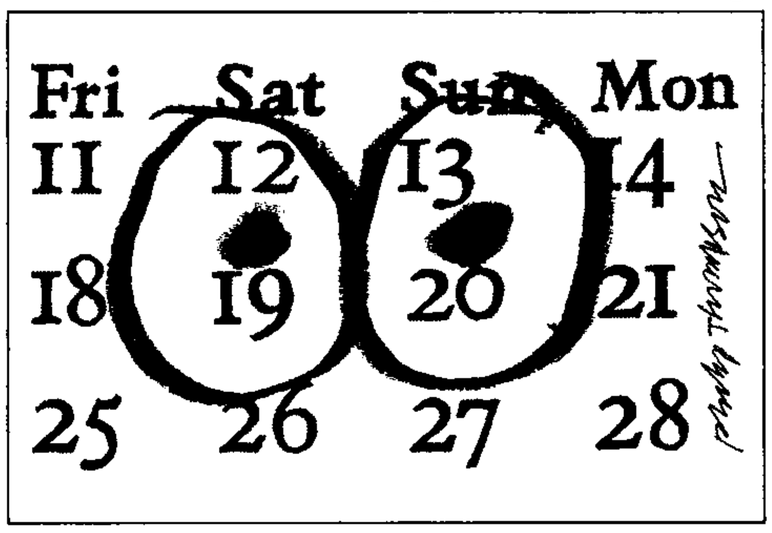
"I first discovered that my ears leaked air about thirty years ago," Wei Mingtang told reporters in Guilin City (in the Chinese province of Guangxi), "and initially I didn't think anything of it. But I gradually realised it was a talent that other people do not have, and that with practice I could turn it into a stage act. And as you have just seen, it is an act that can truly astonish the public."

Wei, a fifty-five-year-old factory worker, had earlier given a demonstration of his unusual aural skills by inflating and extinguishing a series of objects. "First of all, I came up with the idea of inflating a balloon by fitting the rubber nozzle onto a pipe, and inserting the pipe into my left ear. I close my mouth while holding my nose, then try to breathe out, and the air escapes through my ears and inflates the balloon, as you have just seen. I can also blow out candles with my ears, and at a recent Spring Festival Party in the city, I blew out twenty candles in a line within twenty seconds, using a rubber hose connected to both ears like a stethoscope. At present, it's just a hobby, but if I could get my own television series featuring singing, dancing and balloon inflation, maybe I could turn professional." (Nanguo Morning News, 19/2/05. Spotter: David Axson)

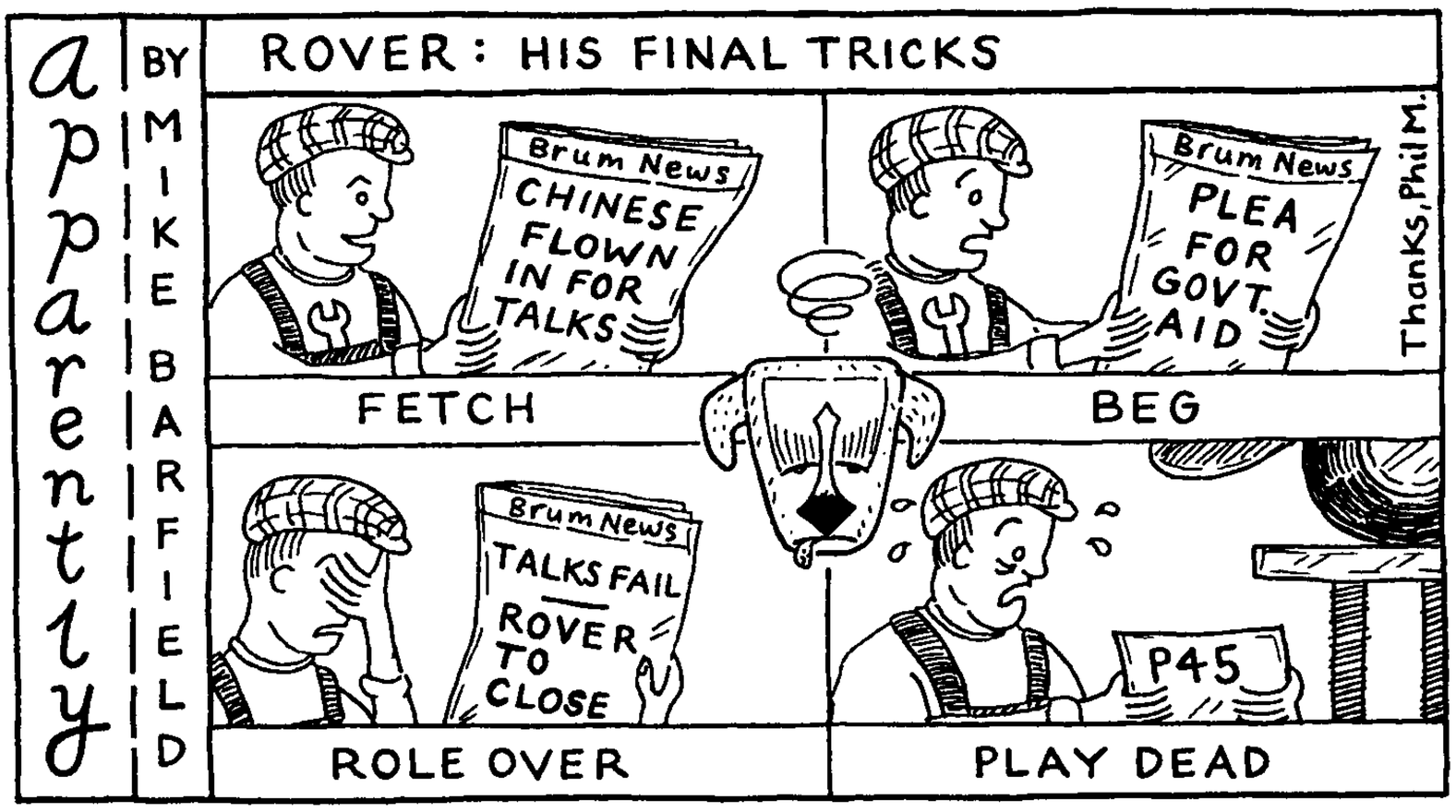
– o –

"This is a story that's been whipped up by my political opponents," Lim El Djurado told reporters from his office in the Ministry of Social Affairs in Phnom Penh, "and I see no need to resign. It's true that I am the publisher of two of our leading pornographic magazines, as well as their chief writer, but so what? I only write them at weekends, and without them I could not continue as a senior government minister, because I cannot live on my salary from the Department of Planning and Statistics."

Lim was speaking after government attempts to confiscate pornographic magazines from Cambodian newsstands had led to the revelation that he was the publisher of *Teenage*



Stimulation and *Rooster*. "My government salary is tiny, so what else is there but the pen? I spend Saturdays and Sundays writing the stories, in order to earn income for my two daughters to go to university, and they help with the design and layout before we send it to the printer. What is the problem? I don't like writing about politics, but I do like writing about sex, and I feel shocked and afraid when somebody says I am doing something wrong. And besides, I don't know what else to do on Saturdays and Sundays." *(The Cambodia Daily, 11/2/05. Spotter: Marcus Chambers)*



(Thanks to Phil Marsden)

How the world's Press covered the most important event in history

The Daily Telegraph

Habemus Papam!!

Rottweilerus Electus Ab Conclavo Cardinalibus

PER NOSTRUM HOMINEM IN VATICANO MARTINUS NOVATERRA, EDITORE TELEGRAPHII QUOTIDIANI

GAUDEAMUS deo gratia! Milliones pilgrimes Catholici exultaverunt in piazza Sancti Petri quando puffum fumi candidi ascendavit in caelum quam signum collegium cardinalorum electaverunt novum papam.

Cardinalis Rolandratticus est primus pontifex Germanicus in tempore modernus. **(Full story in English, see other newspapers.)**

The Sun

PAPA NAZI!

First-Ever Nazi Wins Pope Idol

by Our Man Watching Sky TV

THE SUN can exclusively reveal that a former top SS man yesterday seized power in a Papal coup that has left the world's 1.5 billion Catholics shocked and stunned.

Cardinal Rottweiler, 78, the newly crowned Pontiff, is far from being the humble man of God he likes to pretend to be.

In fact he was one of Hitler's top henchmen, intimately involved in planning World War Two.

No wonder he has taken the name Benito XVIII, in honour of his childhood hero Mussolini, the Fascist dictator who ruled Italy with a rod of iron.

Believers are appalled that (contd p. 94)

The Grauniad

World Horrified As Catholic Is Made Pope

Polly Toynbee
Our Woman in Islington

In what will be remembered as one of the most catastrophic blunders in history, the Catholic church yesterday turned its back on the modern world by electing a white male as Pope, when the whole world was crying out for the choice of a black woman from the developing world.

And worse still – the new so-called Pope of Rome is an unashamed Catholic, who unashamedly champions such antediluvian views as a belief in God.

In what will be viewed as a slap in the face for the world's 1.5 trillion committed atheists (contd p. 94)

Daily Mail

NEW BLAIR GAFFE PUTS TORIES 10 POINTS AHEAD!!

by Our Man in Cloud-Cuckoo Land
Paul Dacre

TONY BLAIR'S outrageous lies have yet again made a Tory win a racing certainty.

At a press conference yesterday, the prime minister shocked his audience by saying "Good morning" when anyone present could see with their own eyes that the rain was pouring down outside and that it was in fact not a very "good morning" at all.

This shameless lie spells the end for the conman Blair, whose inability to tell the truth on any subject has finally convinced Britain's 10.5 million Labour supporters that they should commit suicide tomorrow morning rather than go to the polls and *(contd p. 94)*

The Secret Diary of Sir John Major KG aged 73¾

Monday

I was not inconsiderably pleased at breakfast to hear on the radio that I am to be a knight! And not an ordinary knight. Oh no. I am to be a Knight of the Garter which is, in my judgement, one of the most important knights you can be. As I said to my wife Norman over my bowl of chocolate-flavoured cinammon hoops with dried raspberries, "Only very famous and brave knights are given this great honour."

"Like Mrs Thatcher," she said in her usual unhelpful manner.

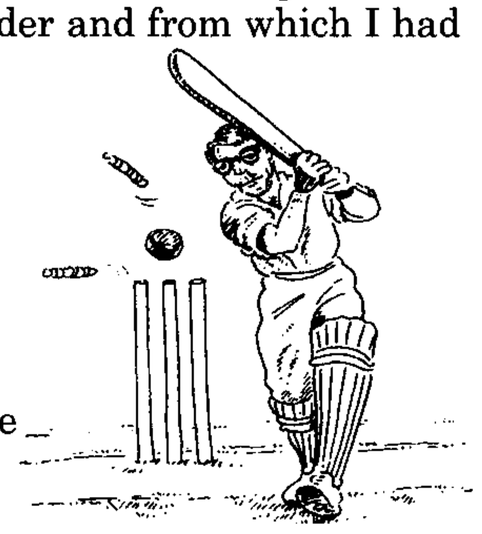
At this moment the phone rang and, naturally, I assumed that it would be someone from Buckingham Palace to tell me what colour to wear at the ceremony. (Grey, I think.)

"Hello," I said. "You are speaking to Sir John Major, Knight of the Garter, oh yes."

There was, however, a familiar voice at the other end of the phone.

"Hello, Sexy-pants," said Mrs Currie, for it was no less than she. "Congratulations! We had some fabulous Nights with Garters, didn't we, Big Boy?"

I was not inconsiderably incandescent with rage at being reminded of something which I had drawn a line under and from which I had made it clear that I had moved on.



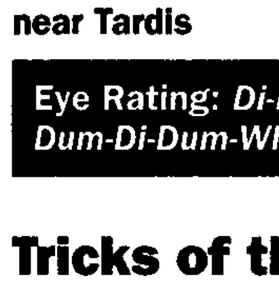
"I think you have the wrong number, Mrs Currie," I said, thinking quickly, so that my wife Norman would not know who was on the phone.

© *J. Major, 2005.*

TV Highlights

Return of the Dalek

BBC1, Saturday 7pm



TERROR strikes as the evil chief Dalek, John Birt, invades the Cabinet with his terrifying plan to destroy Britain with pie-charts and management speak.

For once the doctor is powerless, but he calls on lovely sidekick dame Eithne Asbo, the probation chief, to charm the crazed robot into submission. With her cry of "Fornicate! Fornicate!" *(That's enough, Ed.)*

CAST IN FULL

Chief Dalek	John Birt
Dr Reid	Phil Mitchell
Dame Eithne Asbo	Dame Esther Rantzen
Man given lifetime award for standing near Tardis	Sir David Frost

Eye Rating: *Di-Dum-Di-Dum-Di-Dum-Di-Dum-Whee-Ooh!*

Tricks of the Mind

C4, Friday

TOP illusionist Gordon Brown goes around Britain persuading members of the public to give him all their money. What mysterious power does he have? What mind games is he playing? Will he raise National Insurance?

Eye Rating: *Incredible.*

Let's Parlez Barclais!

Lesson 94 Dans Les Courts

Justice Coqauvin *(pour c'est lui)*: Bonjour, Monsieur Barclais et Monsieur Barclais. Que voulez-vous?

Les Frères Barclais *(ensemble)*: Un writ, s'il vous plait, pour Le Temps de Londres et le Dirty Digger.

Justice Coqauvin: Mais, pourquoi vous ne suez pas en Angleterre?

Les Frères Barclais: Parce que we might lose!

Justice Coqauvin: Vouse êtes un véritable pair de lunes.

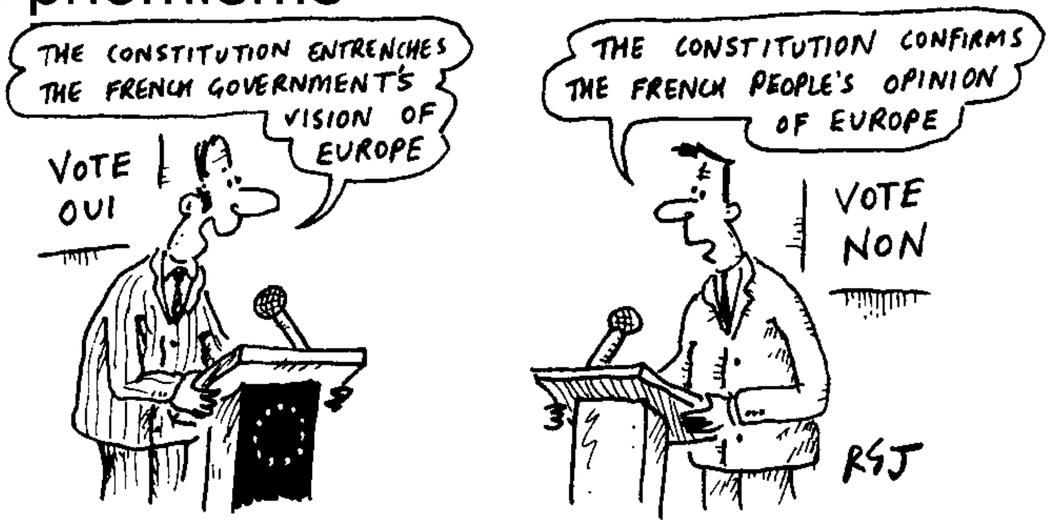
Les Frères Barclais: Bâtard! Nous allons suez VOUS as well!!

Justice Coqauvin: Retournez a votre château sur l'île de Brilleau tout de suite or je senderai vous à prison pour le reste de votre life!

Les Frères Barclais: Boo hoo hoo hoo la la.

(Le case continue)

EU-phemisms


THE CONSTITUTION ENTRENCHES THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT'S VISION OF EUROPE
VOTE OUI
THE CONSTITUTION CONFIRMS THE FRENCH PEOPLE'S OPINION OF EUROPE
VOTE NON
RSJ

High taxes, shady officials and no democracy

Ditto

Meanwhile, as part of the same review process carried out by the Financial Services Skills Council, the Chartered Insurance Institute is withdrawing its Financial Planning Certificate and replacing it with the Certificate in Financial Planning.

Jersey Evening Post

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Sir John Mills, Much-Loved Actor

So. Farewell
Then John
Mills.

You were the
Star of
Countless films.

Yes, we remember
Them.

*In Which
We Serve.*

Ryan's Daughter.

*Oh! What A
Lovely War.*

Ice Cold In Alex.

That was my
Favourite one –
Where they go across
The desert
With the fruity
Nurse and the
Mysterious South
African, who was
A German as it
Turned out.

I know I
Should not give
Away the ending
But most people
Will have
Seen it
By now.
So no harm
Is done.

Anyway there
Are too many
Films to
List.

But they are
All on every
Night on
The TCM
Channel.

In fact I
Am watching one
Now and
You are very
Good in it.

Such is
Immortality.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

This poem has been entered for the Whitbread Young Poet Of The Year Prize (Judges: Andrew Motion, Zachariah Zulu, and a man with a beard).

ELECTION UPDATE DAY 94

LABOUR ACCUSES TORIES OF 'PARTY POLITICS'

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

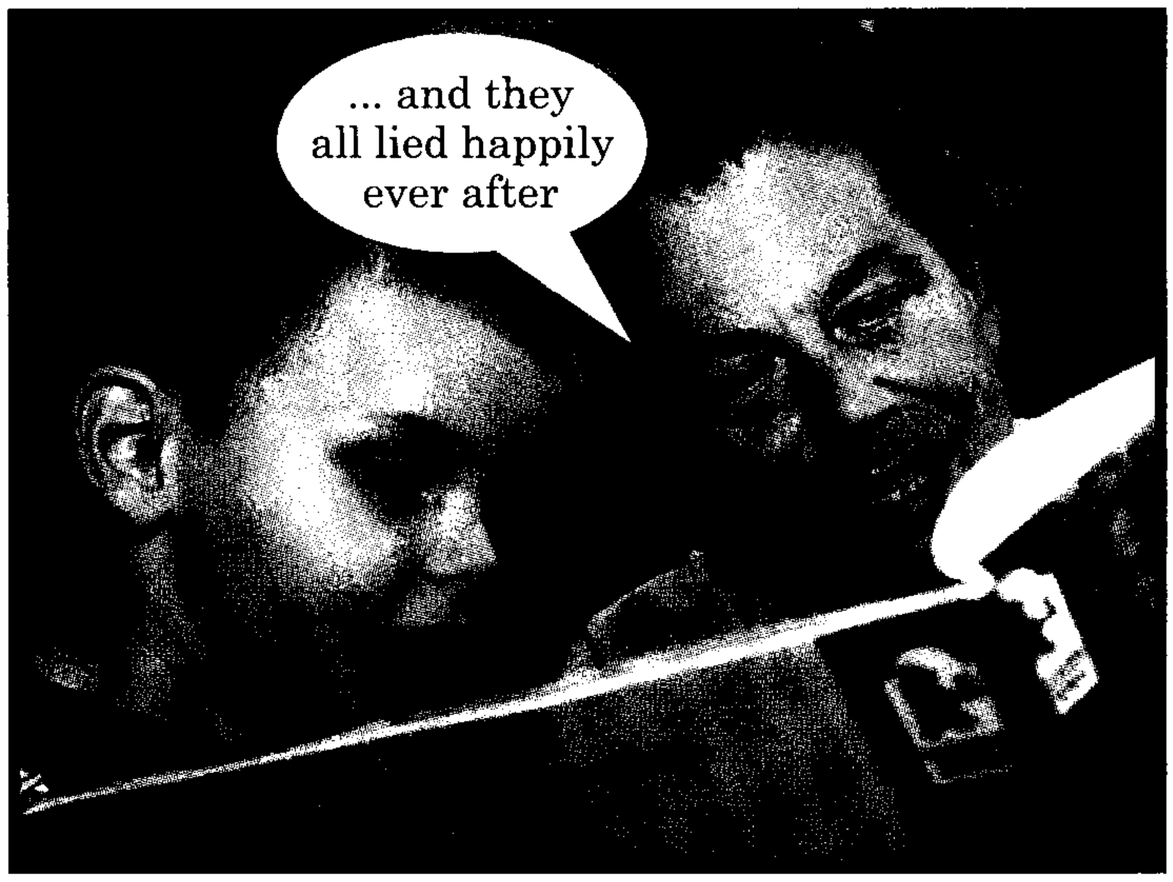
A FURIOUS government spokesman hit out last night at Conservative election tactics.

"There are some things," he said, "that are too important to play party politics with. And one of those is the election."

Vote Labour

He continued, "It's bad enough trying to score party political points about the economy, or the health service, but to introduce party politics into the general election represents a new low."

He concluded, "When it comes to something as vital as a democratic election, surely the whole country can put aside its political differences and unite behind the government."



TORIES ATTACK LABOUR SPENDING PLANS

by Our Political Staff **Anthony Barnet**

A HUGE row developed yesterday over disputed claims of "outrageous overspending".

A senior Conservative spokesman, Sandra Howard, accused the Labour leadership of spending "vast sums of cash" on expensive hairdressers.

"It is scandalous that so much money is being wasted daily on Cherie Blair's hair when Conservative spending in this area is under strict control."

However a spokesman for the Labour party, Cherie Blair, disputed the Conservative claims.

"This is typical of the Tories," she said, "who are merely trying to conceal the fact that their spending plans in this key sector would be way ahead of ours."

Sandra Howard then hit back by saying, "I promise that under the Tories there will be cuts – not to mention trims and blow-dries and perms."

● *Highlights from Sandra Howard's hair can be seen on Newsnight tonight at 10.40pm.*

What You Missed That Paxman-Blair Showdown In Full

Paxman: Prime Minister, the question all the voters want answered at this election is, "How long is a piece of string?"

Blair: Well, Jeremy, there simply isn't an easy answer to that one.

Paxman: But you have some idea?

Blair: No, what we've done is looked at the string very carefully, and looked at ways of measuring it.

Paxman: So, you've no idea, have you?

Blair: It's not a question of having an idea.

Paxman: What are we talking – inches? Feet? Yards? Miles?

Blair: I don't think it's helpful to speculate. The fact is that...

Paxman: So, you've no idea?

Blair: Look, the previous government had no idea of the length of...

Paxman: Oh come on, you've been in power for eight years. You must have some idea by now.

Blair: Look, Jeremy, I've told you – and I come back to this – there's no point in talking about lengths. We're looking at both ends of the string and... er... that's what needs to be done.

Paxman: So you've no idea at all, not even the foggiest clue, as to the length of a piece of string.

Blair: No, what I am saying, and I am saying this quite specifically, is that the length of a piece of string is not just something I can come on here and tell you. Er... it doesn't work like that.

Paxman: Don't know, don't know, don't know, ha, ha, don't know, don't know *(continues all night)*.

Youthful apathy strikes the Peasants' Revolt

What You Wish You Had Missed

The Today Programme

6am

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*: And with the time at 6.00, this is the Today Programme, with me, Jim Naughtie, in the studio...

Caroline Quin *(for it is she)*: ...and me, Sarah Montague, on the battlebus at the Charles Clore Shopping Centre, Milton Keynes.

Naughtie: And our headlines this morning are that Tony Blair will today be announcing his new targets for nutrition standards in Britain's pre-primary school sector. Michael Howard's chosen theme for the day will be the need to get more police back into old people's homes. And Charles Kennedy will be north of the border, focussing on the underfunding of traditional rural skills programmes.

But first the news, read by Charlotte Greenpeace.

Greenpeace: The Prime Minister will today be visiting Hemel Hempstead to announce new targets for the Government's traditional rural skills programme.

The Conservative leader Michael Howard will be outlining his party's plans for better nutrition in Britain's pre-primary schools.

And the Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy will be focussing on the policing needs of our old people's homes.

Naughtie: Thank you, Charlotte. And now, let's test the mood down there in Melton Mowbray. Sarah, how are the ordinary voters reacting to these new proposals?

Quin: Well, Jim, there's hardly anyone around yet here, because it's still a bit early. But I can see one or two lights coming on in the block of flats across the road.

Naughtie: That's fascinating, Sarah. But how do you think the people of Shepton Mallet would react if they had got up and were there talking to you? Can you get a feel at all of how these proposals are playing, in what has been singled out as one of the top 234 key marginals?

Caroline: Well, Jim, what you have to remember is that this is one of the top 234 key marginal seats, and it is what the voters here think that will decide who enters Downing Street on the 6th of May.

Oh, I think there's someone coming! Hang on, excuse me, sir, could you tell us...

Naughtie: ...very interesting, Caroline. Don't go away. We'll be coming back to you when more people have got up! And now it's just coming up to 7.20, and it's time for a look at the papers. And there's no agreement on the main story. Here's the Independent, with a picture of Charles Kennedy, who will today be visiting a pre-primary school in Stoke Poges.

The Telegraph leads on Michael Howard's crackdown on traditional rural skills. And the Guardian tells us that the Prime Minister is going for the grey vote, when he visits an old people's home to talk about policing.

And, finally, the Daily Mail has an amusing cartoon by Mac, showing Robert Kilroy-Silk painting on a wall the words "Kilroy was here".

John Humphrys *(for it is now he)*: Thank you, Jim. And now today is an important day for some of the smaller parties in this election, who will be unveiling their manifestos, telling us what they will be doing when they're in government.

And round the table we've got Hewell Hywell from Plaid Cymru, Jethro Trescothick, deputy leader of the Cornish Independence Party, Shona Spinach, who is a spokesperson for the Greens Party, and, finally, Dave Blackshirt from the British Nice Party, which believes in the repatriation of everyone except himself.

Shona, could I come to you first? The chances of you getting any votes at all in this election are, frankly, nil. So why are you bothering? It's all a bit pointless, isn't it?

Shona *(sobbing)*: Well, you asked me to come on.

Humphrys: Well, that's all we've got time for from the smaller parties. Later in the programme I shall talking to Aqbal Al Mahd, leader of the Death To George Galloway, Oona King And Everyone Else Party. But, first, we're going back to Sarah in Haywards Heath. What's the atmosphere like down there in Essex, or Devon, or wherever it is?

Quin: Well, John, I'm now standing in the middle of a busy shopping centre in this quiet north country village, and I have to say that there is very little sign of election fever in what is one of the top 234 key marginals in the country. A car has just gone past, with a window sticker referring to the Prime Minister in a rather unflattering way!

Humphrys: Ha, ha, ha!

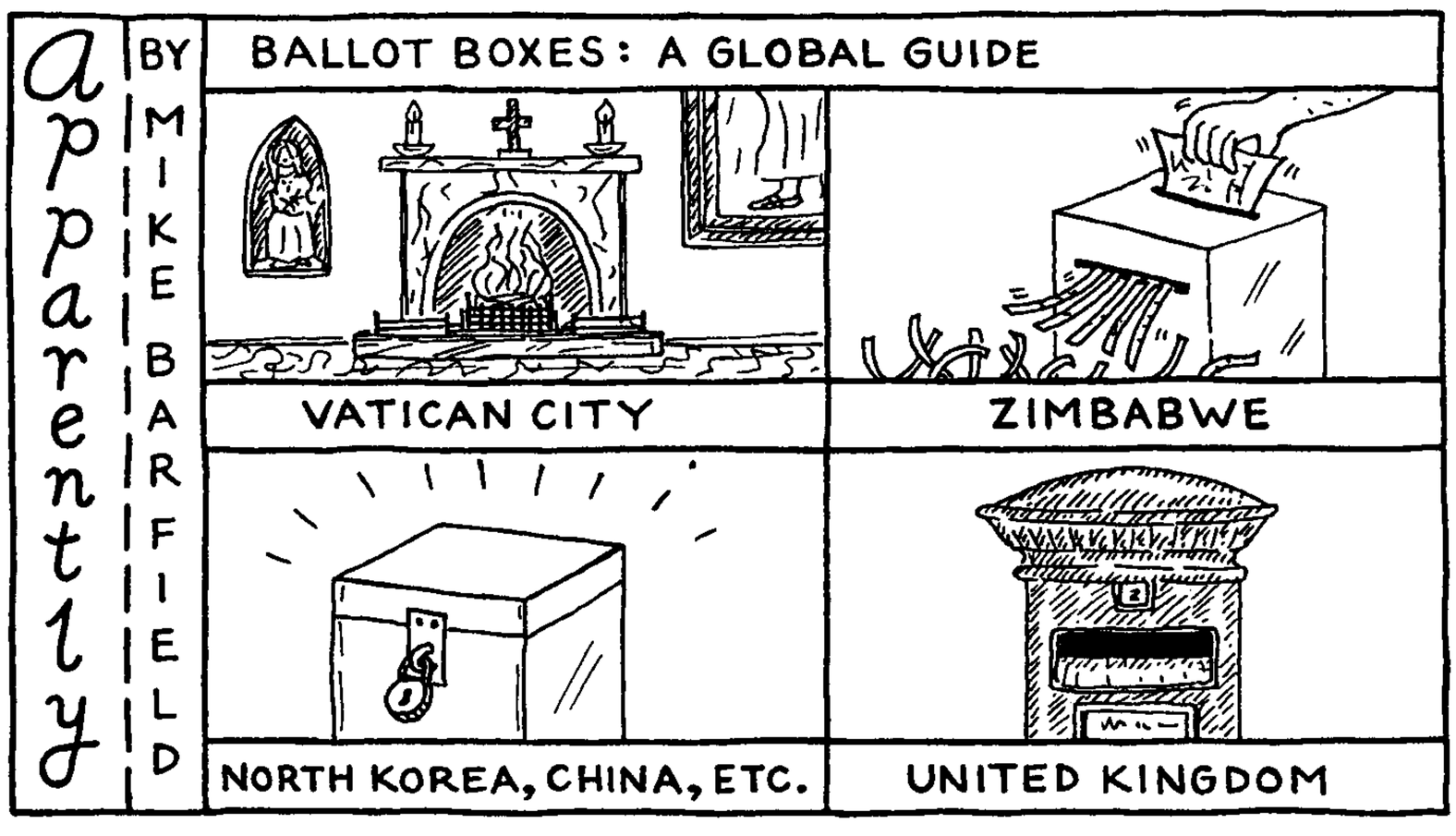
Quin: And I suppose we could take that as a pointer to the way the swing voters are leaning in this all-important inner city marginal. But I wouldn't want to read too much into it at this early stage.

Humphrys: Thank you, Caroline. And now it's 7.45 and here in the studio we have our old friend, Bob Worcester-Sauce, from the polling organisation Sori Wegotthatwrong. Bob, do you think the various initiatives we're going to see today from the party leaders – that's more police in old people's homes, a boost for traditional rural skills, better nutrition for the under-5s – is that going to make a difference, especially in those key 234 marginals that we keep hearing about?

Bertie Wooster: That's a fascinating question. I think what we're seeing overall at the moment is that there's very little movement from any of the 14 demographic social groups which we've identified as being the decisive swing factor in the days which remain before polling. For example, the Gay Over-70s were two weeks ago registering a very significant 32.7 percent support for the Lib Dems, but the most recent figure shows this as having declined to only 32.6 percent, which, if replicated across the country, could give the Scottish Nationalists a very real prospect...

Naughtie: ...I'll have to stop you there, Bob, because it's time for Charlotte Green to have another look at the papers.

Green: And there's no agreement on the main story. The Daily Telegraph has an exclusive about the Prime Minister's planned visit to an old policemen's home to talk about traditional skills for the under-5s and *(continued for 94 hours)*



Advertisement

NEW FROM GNOME!

The PEEING PAULA

A UNIQUE souvenir of an historic sporting event that doubles as a charming water feature for your garden.

No ornamental pool will be complete without this elegant stone-style statue made from Gnomex™, by world-famous sculptor Michelangelo di Heathi, of Britain's top female athlete on her way to a world-beating victory in the London Marathon.

Says TV's Alan Titchmarsh,
"The Peeing Paula is your chance to own a piss of history"
(Shurely shome mishtake? Ed.)

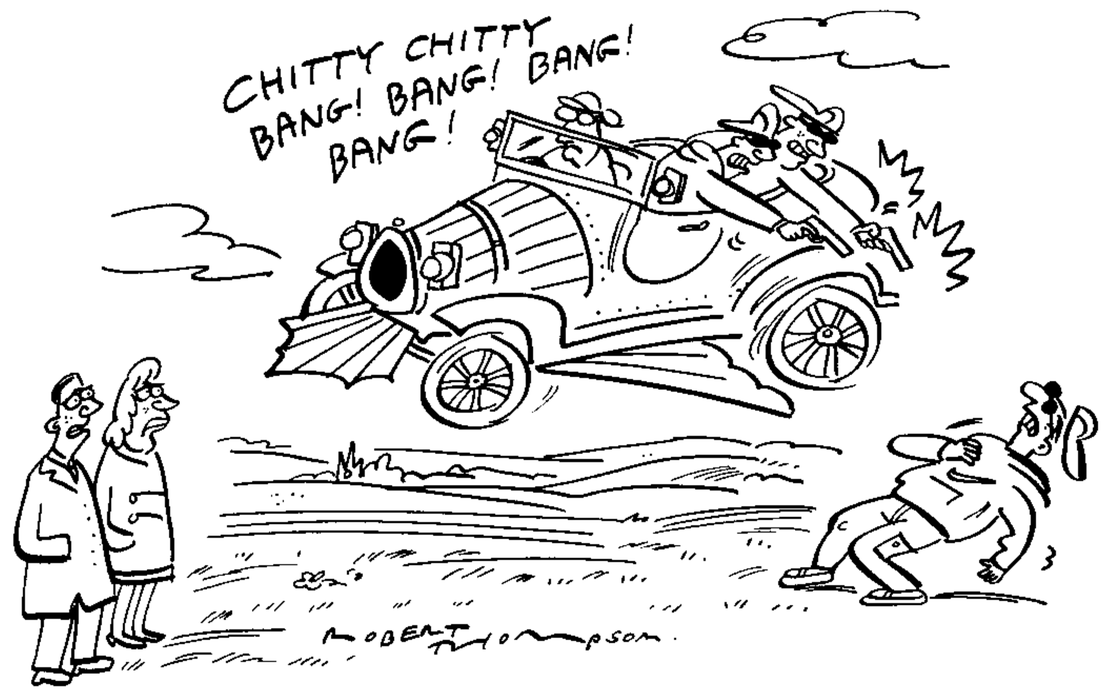
Why We Need I.D. Cards

by Sir Ian Blair

IT IS vital for our society to have I.D. cards so that we can tell the difference between people who have the same name, such as Blair. Without I.D. cards it would be very easy to mistake the Mr Blair who wants to scare the public about terrorism and ignore civil liberties with the other Mr Blair who wants to scare the public about terrorism and ignore civil liberties.

This would lead to terrible confusion over identities and that is why, as a Prime Minister and a senior policeman, I am strongly recommending I.D. cards for everyone at once.

© T. Blair, Commissioner for Police.



"My, how children have changed over the years!"

Before

After

Has Michael Douglas had plastic surgery?

by Our Showbiz Staff **Hugh Cares**

HOLLYWOOD experts are convinced that the ageing star of Fatal Attraction has had a nip-and-tuck to try and turn back the biological clock.

PR men for the movie legend say it's all down to improved diet and a new exercise regime, but close observers say that Michael's new youthful look would be impossible without surgical procedures.

But the star himself remained tight-lipped because his face doesn't move any more *(That's enough of this rubbish. Ed.)*

Robert Mugabe: The Early Years

Duchess of Love

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of *La Dame Aux Camillas*, *Heir of Sorrows*, and *Born To Be Queen Consort*.

THE STORY SO FAR: After the excitements of that unforgettable wedding day, married life is proving blissful for the royal couple.

Now read on...

"ARE you ready, darling? We don't want to be late for church." Charles adjusted the sporran on his Clan McGonagall kilt for the third time, as he waited for Camilla to finish her post-breakfast Crofter's Full Strength cigarette on the Balmoral terrace.

What a wonderful spring morning it was – just right for them to sally forth to church together for the first time as man and wife.

Charles gazed across the heather-strewn sward of Glen Fiddich to where the tower of the little celtic church of St Brillo peeped between the dark conifers.

As the sound of a single bell summoned them to worship, Charles's thoughts went back to unhappier times when he trod this same path with his first wife.

How different it was then. The vast crowds of press-men and photo-graphers jostling to get a photograph of her.

"Over here, love." "Give us a smile, Princess." "Just one more, Di!"

And how she had relished performing for them, as he trailed disconsolately in her wake, his hands clasped behind his back to express his frustration...

"OK, Chazza, let's do it!" But there she was, his blushing new bride, in the familiar red outfit that she liked so much.

And wasn't that the Taj Mahal diamond she was wearing at her throat, its iridescent surface sparkling in the Highland sunshine like a shoal of tropical fish flashing through the translucent waters of the Great Barrymckenzie Reef? *(Get on with it. Ed.)*.

"Do you know, Cammers...," Charles began, waving a finger at the gleaming jewel, "...that brooch was a gift to my grandmother, the Queen Mother, from the Biryani of Madras at the time of the Coronation in 1937, as a sort of symbolic..."

"Very interesting, Chaz, but you can tell me all about it later. We really must get a move on. Isn't that the vicar waving to us?"

"No, no, it's not the vicar. Up here we call them ministers. This one's called the Reverend Ronald McDonald..."

"THE Reverend Ronald McDonald at your service, ma'am. May I welcome you to our humble kirk, and may I be so bold as to say how radiant you look this morning in that beautiful red outfit?"

Charles's heart swelled with pleasure. How warmly she was being accepted by everyone!

And seeing the crowds of local people who had gathered outside the church to welcome him and his new bride – some of them from as far away as Tokyo – his fears melted away like the winter snows from the distant summit of Ben Pimlott.

As the traditional service began, with a rousing rendition of that well-loved old Scottish hymn, Mull of Kintyre, Charles felt that at last he was coming to what his old friend and mentor Sir Laurens van der Postalfraud used to call "the plateau of contentment".

How well he remembered that long-ago night round the camp fire in the Kalagassi Desert, when the white-haired sage had been roasting a snake on a spit according to an old Bushman recipe for "snake and chips". His reverie was broken by the solemn tones of the craggy-faced Scottish minister.

"My brethren," began Rev. McDonald, looking down on them from the simple pinewood pulpit, "My theme for today is that plateau of contentment which we all seek as we journey through life."

"Aye, aye, so we do the noo," chorused the loyal flock of ghillies and fisherfolk from the estate, as Camilla stole a glance at her Cartier Ruck watch. "How long is this going to go on?" she whispered to Charles...

"HOW long is this going to go on?" Charles called out jokingly to the massed ranks of photographers, as the couple stood on the church path when the service had finally come to a close, with the organist playing an impromptu version of *'Lady in Red'* for his voluntary, in honour of the new parishioner.

Charles's traditional impatience with the attentions of the fourth estate had quite disappeared now that he knew that this time the focus would be on him as the heir to the throne. Camilla would be there, but in the background, as his support and "help-meet thingie", as the silvery-haired archbishop had put it so movingly at their service of blessing after the visit to the Windsor Register Office.

"Sorry, old girl, but you know I do have to do this sort of thing. Duty calls and all that."

Charles laughed as he strode purposefully down the path to greet a small child who was holding out a jam roll made by her grandmother Mrs McTavish.

"I suppose you want a shot of me sort of eating this jam thingie, do you?" Charles smilingly volunteered to the hundreds of waiting photographers.

But scarcely had he spoken than he was swept aside, as the horde of paparazzi rushed past him to where his wife was standing alone by the church gate.

"Over here, love." "Give us a smile, Duchess." "Just one more, Camilla."

Charles gazed forlornly at the scene, as the little girl snatched the jam roll from his hand and ran off towards the newly-ennobled Duchess of Rothmans...

(To be continued)

© *Sylvie Krin, the 'Luton Airport Collection'.*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

An Important Announcement From The Editor, Mr Campbell

The Vicar has asked me to explain why this week there will be no parish newsletter. This is because, during the PCC elections, it would be improper for the newsletter to appear, as this might influence parishioners into supporting the Vicar, which they will obviously be doing anyway, rather than voting for a vampire or a drunk. A.C.

POLLS REVEAL VOTING PROSPECTS

● The latest opinion polls have revealed which of the major polling organisations will attract the most voters saying who they'll be voting for in the run up to the general election.

ICM	**18% (+4)**
POP	**16% (-3)**
MORI	**4% (+2)**
YOUGOV	**3% (-1)**
Undecided, but will probably walk a bit faster and mutter something about having a train to catch when the clipboard is thrust in their face	**59% (unchanged)**

● Polling organisations warned, however, that people shouldn't read too much into these figures as they are, like all polls, subject to unforseen statistical variations, such as the fact that they are completely wrong.

GLENDA SLAGG

FLEET STREET'S BATTLE BUS!!

■ **HANDS OFF Posh 'n' Becks!!! What has Britain's golden couple ever done to have their dirty linen washed in public!!!? And who's to blame???! Abby Gibson, that's who!!??? Aka The Nanny From Hell!!!? So what's your problem, darling???! Sour grapes 'cos you're not a glamour girl like your boss????!!! Or have you got the hots for her hubby who, naturally, turned you down!!??! What right have you got to spill the beans on the nicest couple on the planet???!? Eh???!!???!**

■ HATS OFF to the bean-spilling Nanny who wasn't afraid to tell the world the intimate secrets of Casa Beckham – ie, their marriage is going down the toilet!!???! And don't tell me it's not in the public interest!!??! I'M interested!! And I'm a member of the public??!? (Geddit???!??) So come on Nanny Abby, fill our boots with noos – and the dirtier the better – about the most miserable couple on the planet!!???!

■ *PEACHES GELDOF???!? Purleaze!!?? Go back to your room and do your homework and don't let me catch you on the television again!??! Geddit????!*

■ TESCO'S!!!??? How dare they make all that profit by forcing us to spend our money in their shops on cheap food???!?? There should be a law against it!!??! *(Are you sure about this? Ed.)*

■ HERE they are – Glenda's May-Poll-Dancers (Geddit??!?):

● **Melvyn Bragg** – He may not like wind farms, but he can generate enough wind to power **my** batteries!?! Geddit????!

● **Pope Benedict XVI** – Ok, he may be an old celibate homophobe, but that's how I like 'em!??!

● **Heston Blumental** – He's the chef at the Fat Duck, stoopid!!!? Snail porridge and bacon-and-egg ice cream... Crazy name, crazy menu!!?

Byeeee!!!

Shadowy Australian At Heart Of British Election Campaign Writes Open Letter To Tory Candidates

You're stuffed. You're buggered. You're finished.

Stone the crows, you galahs, can't you see you haven't got a dingo's hope in hell of winning this election?

The public couldn't give a flying XXXX for Michael Howard.

Don't you bloody drongos read The Sun?

I decide who wins this election... and it ain't you lot.

Regards,
Rupert Murdoch

Advertisement

Oh no... we've botched up another campaign... bloody Howard banging on about asylum seekers... what people want to hear about is tax cuts and plenty of them... brilliant, another bloody Labour landslide... four more years in the political wilderness... for pity sake even Hague or bloody Duncan Smith could have done better than this... bloody dog whistle politics...

Are you thinking what we're thinking?
THE CONSERVATIVES

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD
WELL WAYNE, YOU MUST BE LOOKING FORWARD TO THE GAME WITH ARSENAL
EVERYONE SAYS IT'S GOING TO BE ONE HELL OF A CLASH...
MILLENNIUM STADIUM
LOOK, COLLEEN'S WEARING A DOLCE AND GABBANA JACKET AND A MISSONI NECKLACE HA! HA!
HILARIOUS, A JACOB'S WATCH WITH UGG BOOTS!
GROSS! CHAV JEANS AND A CHLOE BAG!

0.35 Kimberly. Romantic Comedy. USA 1999

The oarsmen Bob and his friends are a team in their boat but fall out over romance. All four fall in love with the attractive Kimberly and start affairs with her. When she becomes pregnant it becomes a matter of sorting out who the father is. This puts the friendship of the four to a severe test.

TV programme listing, Stern magazine (Germany)

★ BAGHDAD TIMES ★
Friday 29 April 2005

VIOLENCE OVERSHADOWS ELECTION

by Our Man In London A.A. Gilgamesh

ANY HOPE that the British elections would pass off peacefully was shattered by the horrifying explosion of violence which has erupted in the eastern suburbs of the capital city, London.

Huge mobs of fanatical Islamic extremists have roamed the streets, issuing death threats to the handful of candidates who have been brave enough to stand for election, in a bid to restore democracy to Britain after years as a one-party state.

A particular target of the insurgent gangs has been George Galawi, a loyal supporter of dictator Saddam Hussein, who now runs the Shite Party, and who has faced repeated death threats for daring to stand up for Iraq against the imperialist aggressors.

Babylondon

Another victim of this sea of sectarian violence is the candidate of the official ruling party, Oona King, who has tried to promote multi-ethnic tolerance in this troubled city by being the first ever white, black, female, Jewish Muslim since Michael Jackson.

O Little Town of Bethnal Green

In fact, things in London have got so bad that the city's mayor, Ken Livingstone (known to his millions of followers as Salamander the Magnificent), can only travel in a bullet-proof vehicle, surrounded by armed guards.

So much for democracy British-style.

"She's moved on from flower pressing"

MANDELSON ADMITS 'ENJOYING FREEBIE'

by Our Brussels Staff
Hugh Rowe-Sleeze

PETER MANDELSON has finally admitted that since November he has been enjoying the lavish hospitality of a shadowy organisation known as the 'European Commission', based in Brussels.

"Peter Mandelson can confirm that he has attended a number of lavish official receptions and enjoyed rent-free accommodation from the European Commission," said a spokesman for Mr Mandelson. "However this has in no way affected his ability to travel around the world to attend lavish parties thrown by billionaires on their yachts in the Caribbean."

I-SPY *Denmark*

Submitted by C.D. Morton.

Those Terms of Reference for the Nicholson Inquiry into the collapse of MG-Rover

1 The inquiry will lay the blame for the fiasco solely at the feet of John Towers and his Phoenix cronies for stripping £50 million out of the company.

2 The inquiry will ignore the role of Stephen Byers and the fact that the Government stood by and encouraged Phoenix, and will not mention Mrs Patricia Hewitt, who repeatedly publicly praised Phoenix's entrepreneurial spirit.

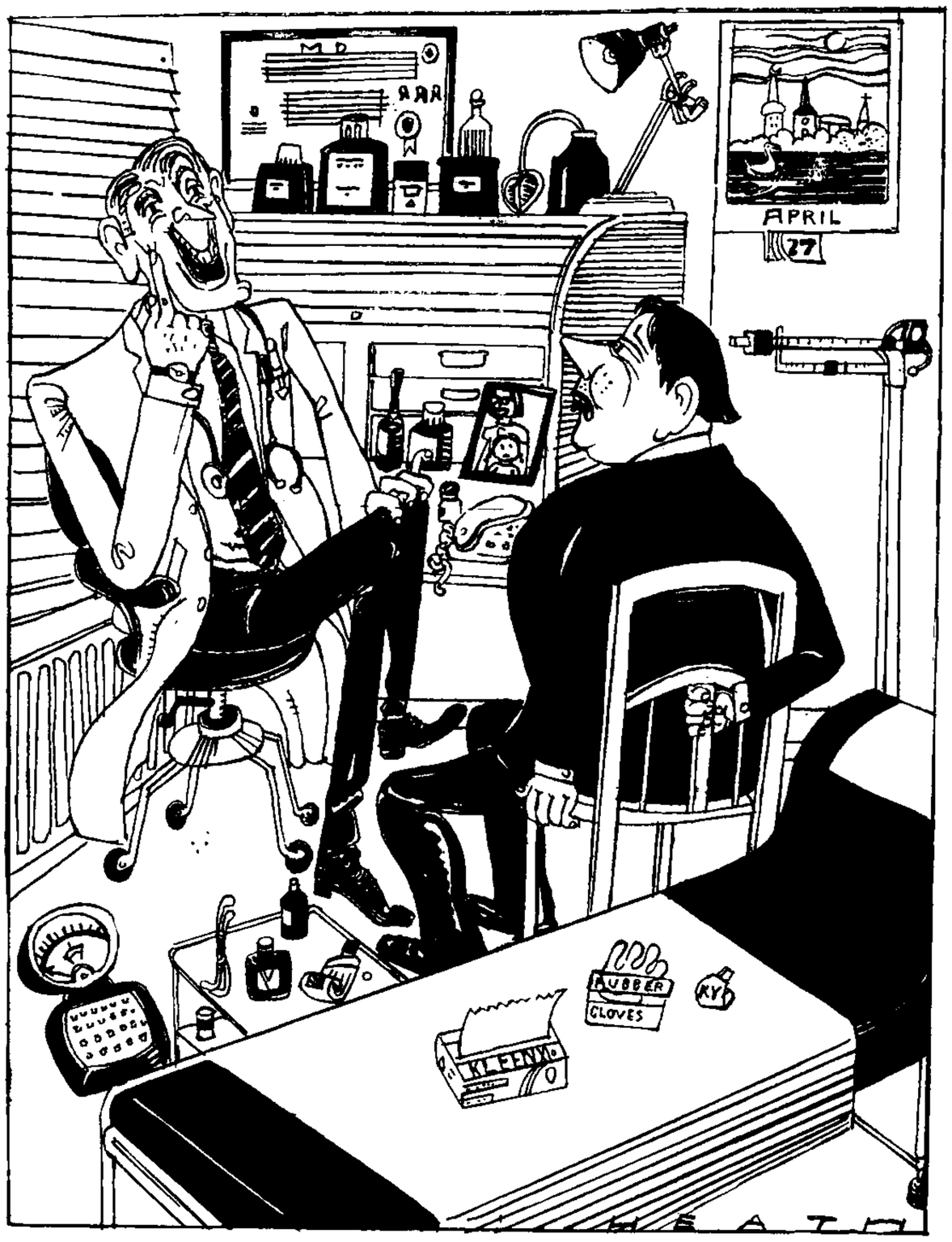
3 The report will appear sometime when the fuss has died down.

4 Er...

5 That's it.

LADY, reasonable looks, medium build, 65, likes short walks, outings, the occasional drunk.

Westmorland Gazette



"As you are paying me in a private capacity, I shall pretend to be interested in your condition"

Sun Election Poll

Britain's top political commentator, the *Sun's* Trevor Kavanagh, poses the big election question that has got the whole country talking.

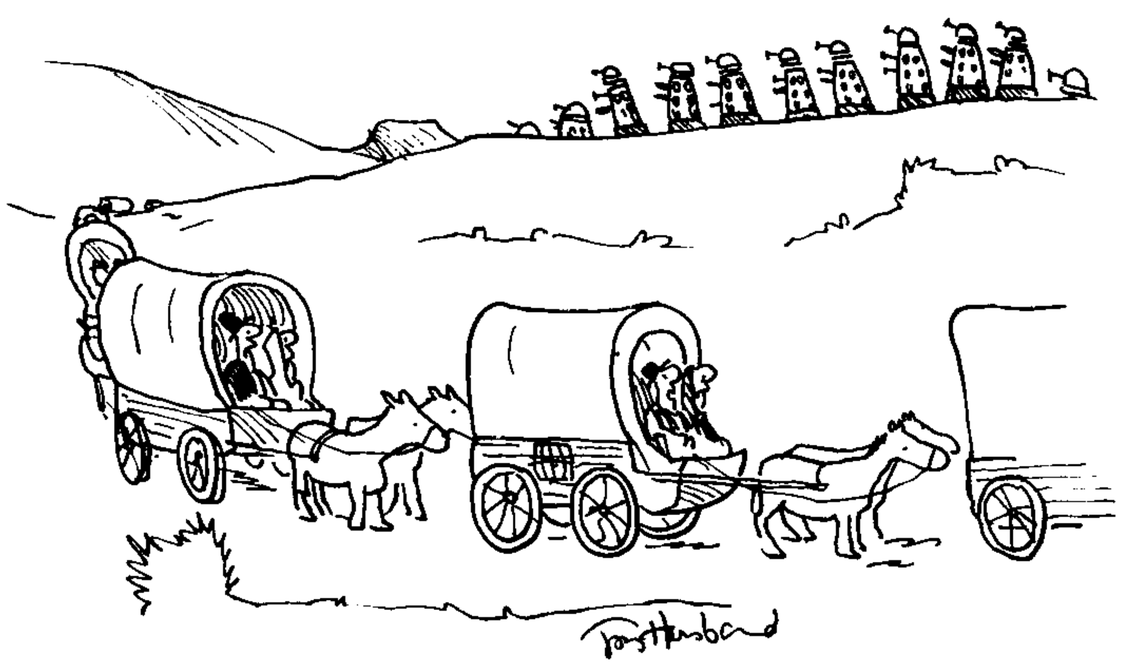
● Did Paula pee or poo? *YOU DECIDE!*

Phone the *Sun* election hotline now with your verdict.

❑ No 1s **0870 261261** ❑ No 2s **0870 262262**

(calls at premium rate – £1.38p per second)

Win a night out on the town with the new Pope, Papa Pizza!!! (Surely 'Eggs Benedict XVI'? Ed)



"Daleks! Form a circle!"

Comment

The Telegraph is profoundly grateful to Jessica Haigh for her uncompromising cross-questioning of Tony Blair during his question-and-answer session in Leeds.

Not only did this plucky 20-year-old student sum up the heartfelt feelings of many disillusioned Labour voters when she spoke up over her disenchantment over Iraq, globalisation and spin, and break through the stage-managed artifice of this bankrupt election campaign, but she also gave us another excuse to put a cracking piece of young totty on the front cover, instead of some dull man in a suit who *(cont. p. 94)*

Advertisement

NEW DVD

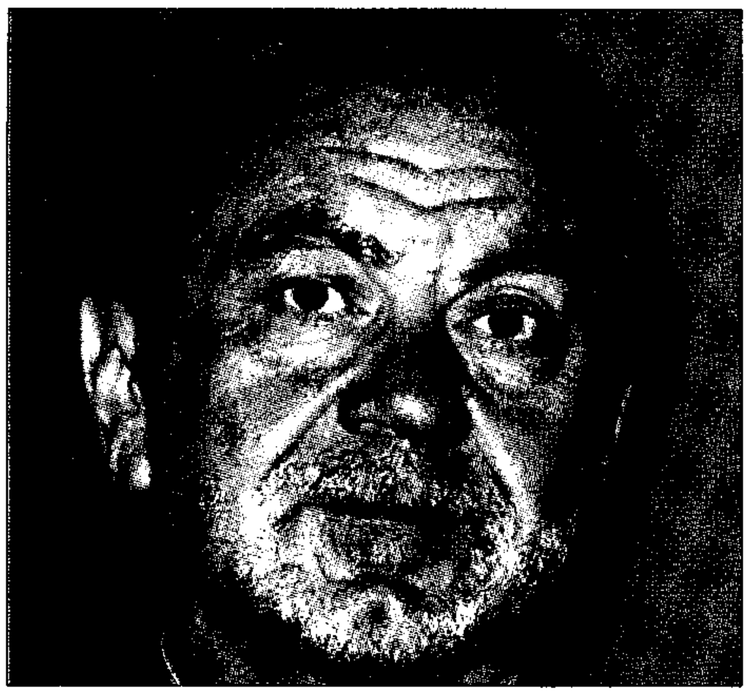
From Britain's Top Comedian

Is This The Way To I'm-a-Brillo?

Hysterical remake of the Peter Kay classic with all of the country's top political commentators joining TV funnyman Andrew Brillo in a laugh-out-loud celebration of the BBC's commitment to public service broacasting.

♪ *Is this the way to I'm-a-Brillo?*
Is that really Michael Portillo?
My head should be upon my pillow,
Instead of sitting up watching this rubbish

DIARY



ALAN SUGAR

When I started out, I dint go out to posh restaurants to eat their fancy nosh. D'you think I had time for all that toffee-nosed crap? I left that to the schmoozers and the bullshitters – and look where it bloody got them. Today, I'm sitting with my arse on top of a global empire worth £700 million. And they can't even afford a pair of second-hand knickers from Ox-bloody-fam.

So much for schmoozers and bullshitters.

No. I wanted to get on in life. Even if it meant missing my bloody nosebag.

But I believe in rewarding loyalty. That's the bottom line.

Rule 1: A dog does well, you throw him a bone. That way, he'll come when you whistle.

So yesterday I took three of my colleagues out for a slap-up meal at the Savoy, and, take it from me, that costs.

"Okay," I said. "Have whatever you want from the menu, and I'll pick up the tab. Generous offer, and I never go back on my word. You got forty minutes from… NOW! – so you better eat your bollocks off, do I make myself clear? I said, do I make myself clear?"

The waitress comes, and they was ordering like there's no tomorrow – starter, main course, the whole bloody bollocks. But from the outset they made some serious mistakes.

Gareth goes first. Orders the Prawn Cocktail. "The Prawn Cocktail!" I says, "What you want to go and do that for, Gareth? You must be out of your tiny mind!"

"Oh, Sir Alan," says Gareth. "I've always liked the pink sauce what they comes with."

"Don't you Oh Sir Bloody Alan me, my son," I says. "You bloody what? You bloody what? You always liked the pink – don't give me that! You're sending me a suicide message, my friend. Pink sauce costs nothing. You know what sort of mark-up they're asking on that pink sauce? 800, 900 per cent. And he says he's always liked pink sauce! What kind of bloody fool is that? You order a Prawn Cocktail, you're going to get dished, my friend."

"Actually, Sir Alan," says Gareth. "I just changed my mind. I'll have the paté."

Rule 2: Never chop and change. It sends out all the wrong messages, and you'll get your head sliced off.

"That's your second mistake, my friend," I says. "Place like this, you don't just say, 'I'll have the paté'. You say, "Look, mate, what's the best price you can do me for the paté?" Or else the waitress will never respect you."

" 'Ow d'you know the waitress's name was Else, then, Sir Alan?" says Gareth.

"Gareth – you're fired!" I says.

Rule 3: In the dining out game, keep your eye on the ball, or you'll be kicked to death by your own team.

So we're all settling in nicely, having a bit of a chat – remember, teamleaders, always encourage your team-members to have a bit of a chat but IN THEIR OWN TIME – when a waiter comes up with this bloody great basket and asks us if we want some.

"What's the product?" I says.

"Bread, sir," he says.

"How much, my friend?" I says.

"It's free, sir," he says.

"I'll take the lot!" I says, "Then fill your basket up again, bring it back here, and I'll take that load too".

And that's precisely what he did. Be under no illusion: if you're offered something, and the deal's to your advantage, buy up the stock before they up the price. I didn't get where I am today by settling for a single bread-roll when I could have had dozens. When I get behind a project, I give it 200 per cent.

"Henry," I says to my number 3. "We got here what? 20, 25 bread rolls? But they're not buttered, are they? Big mistake! Listen here. What I want you to do is butter them, then go round the tables and pitch directly to them, offering them READY-BUTTERED bread on a decent mark-up. These are big businessmen, men of the world, captains of bloody industry, leaders of the business community – they're not the sort of clientele who wants to waste valuable trading time buttering their own bread!"

Rule 4: Focus on the bottom line. In the world of restaurants, it's dog eat dog.

So Henry's finished his buttering and he's off round the restaurant with his bread-basket, Gareth's out on his arse, and I'm left looking at this piece of fancy white cloth in front of me.

"Whatya call this, then, Denise?" I say to my secretary.

"It's a napkin, Sir Alan," she says.

"That's as maybe. And what would you use this 'napkin' for, Denise?"

"Wiping your mouth and hands, Sir Alan."

"What they charge for 'em, you reckon?"

"Nothing, Sir Alan."

"Nothing! I got this right? They're handing out good clean linen, asking the punters to cover it with muck, then spending time washing it and ironing it and whatever – AND ALL FOR NO CASH BLOODY RETURN? They must be stark staring bloody mad! Off you go, Denise!"

And with that, Denise is off to negotiate with the management vis-a-vis taking a hundred-weight of paper serviettes off our hands, which we pick up wholesale for a tenth of the price. The bottom line is there's no down-side to waste-matter: there's always cash in getting rid of it.

Rule 5: Never underestimate me, my friend, because you'll be making a fatal mistake and I'll sue the bloody pants off you.

My dining companions might have been otherwise employed, but my solo meal's the pig's bloody bollocks. OK, so I don't like cabbage, never have, but in the eating-out game you got to roll with the punches.

Exactly 40 minutes on, I tot up the bill on my Amstrad calculator, but the battery must've gone. So I settle the bill through a subsidiary company based in the Caymans, and I'm being transported back to my boardroom in my personalised Bentley, registered in Hong Kong. From my vehicle, I ring through to the office on my Amstrad mobile phone. Then I ring again, and again, but I still can't get a bloody peep out of it. "What a pile of bloody toot!" I say to my chauffeur, throwing the piece of crap out the window.

Rule 6: Never be content with second best.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

A MATE OF MINE'S WIFE HAD THIS YOUNG SINGLE FRIEND WHO WAS LOOKING FOR ROMANCE. SO SHE SET ME UP ON A BLIND DATE WITH HER...
REALLY?
YEAH. I GAVE HER A CALL AND ARRANGED TO MEET AT A CERTAIN TIME AND PLACE... SHE SOUNDED REALLY NICE...
AND...?
DISASTER, MATE. IT ALL WENT VERY PEAR-SHAPED. I ENDED UP TOTALLY HUMILIATED...
OH NO! HOW COME?
SHE SAID "HOW WILL I RECOGNISE YOU?"!
WHAT?! BUT YOU'RE MEGA, GARY...
ANYWAY I HUNG UP...

Literary Review

Manifestly dreadful

Forward Not Back: Labour Election Manifesto 2005

It's Time For Action: Conservative Election Manifesto 2005

The Real Alternative: Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2005

ONE expects so little from politicians these days. Intellectual ability, personal probity, capacity to achieve stated aims – all these have gone flying out of the window along with top hats, striped trousers and Winston Churchill's cigar. All the same, it comes as rather a shock to find basic literacy added to this list of desiderata.

Here are the documents in which our three main political parties set out their programmes for the next few years, and what – politics aside – is their distinguishing factor? Why, an absolute terror in the company of language, a deep syntactical unease and a general attitude to the beauties of "English" might be compared to a gorilla toying with a Sevres vase.

It was not always thus. The 1983 Conservative manifesto, for example, was adjudged – by its opponents – to be notably well-written. Not surprising, as the author was later revealed as the novelist Ferdinand Mount, then head of Mrs Thatcher's policy unit. You doubt somehow that Ferdie had anything to do with *It's Time For Action*. To do justice to whoever put this slim catalogue of terse slogans ("More police" "School discipline", "Lower taxes" etc) together, it does at least have the virtue of brevity – that, and a certain weary pithiness. "I believe that Britain could be doing so much better," Michael Howard chides in his introduction, sounding rather like a once optimistic schoolmaster sadly disillusioned after a year among the Lower Fourth.

Over in the Lib Dem camp, on the other hand, great claims are being made – not all of them, alas, supported by grammatical accuracy. "Every sign is that we can win more votes and elect more Liberal Democrat MPs" suggests the frontispiece, meaning "There is every sign that..." A bit later, someone avers that "our instinctive internationalism – through positive and proactive engagement with Europe, the United Nations and the Commonwealth – is definitive." *Our instinctive internationalism is definitive*? God knows what this means. However, treasury spokesman Vince Cable gets a bonus mark for beginning his statement with the words "First, and most important...". Nine out of ten politicians would have gone for "more importantly".

All this is as nothing, though, the merest of bagatelles, when set against the 100-plus pages of subliterate vapouring that is *Forward Not Back* – almost as good as a slogan in its way as "War is Peace" or "Freedom is Slavery". Everything one has come to expect from eight years of "new" Labour policy briefings is there: the verbless sentences, the definitive articles gone mysteriously astray, the two or three tense per sentence formulations, the horror jargon of "empowerment", "proaction", above all a kind of terrible, dogged, but ultimately fruitless quest for meaning. Our glorious leader sets the tone in his preamble. "Our case rests on one idea more than any other – that it is the duty of government to provide opportunity and security for all in a changing world." It does? Oh, and the ensuing programme will, ah, "embed a new progressive consensus in our country." You can embed a consensus? Bless my soul!

The shout-lines ("Rising Prosperity in an Opportunity Society", "Democracy: power devolved; citizens empowered") are, of course, unutterably funny. One might as well say "Good not bad" or "Butter not margarine" for all the sense of anything serious seriously conveyed. It goes without saying that promises aren't delivered, they are "delivered on".

Certain sentences are so gloriously loopy in their construction as to suggest that TB merely rambled away into a dictaphone and had the results printed up verbatim. Thus: "I know the change is possible. Not just because I have studied the statistics, but because I have seen it with my own eyes." Some desired effect is "possible", apparently, but our man has already seen it, and "with his own eyes" – rather, that is, than using someone else's.

Actually, this is a lot less funny than it sounds – illiterate, patronising and, for a government that bangs on endlessly about the advantages of education, deeply offensive. A century ago informed onlookers reckoned that a fair proportion of Campbell-Bannerman's Liberal cabinet could have earned their bread by the pen, had the opportunities of government been denied them. This lot would be lucky to pass their Sats.

Ah, soul boy

The Way We Wore: A Life In Threads

Robert Elms

(Picador, £12.99)

AS everyone who lives elsewhere would agree, London has much to answer for.

Not only is it bigger, richer, noisier and nastier than everywhere else put together, but to the outsider it seems as though it's full of people like Robert Elms. This wearying gobshite, one of the first people ever to delight in the description "style journalist", has somehow managed to maintain a high-profile media career for more than 20 years, telling us what's fashionable in sad magazines, presenting unspeakable yoof TV shows in polo necks and, these days, ranting away on radio shows with that infuriating self-conscious chuckle in his voice.

Elms is, by his own admission, a Londoner. Indeed, his Londonness is so pronounced that not only does it define him but, as far as he is concerned, he defines it. London, as Elms sees it, is Elms. Only the M25 is large enough to contain his ego, and even that's cracking under the strain.

Remarkably, *The Way We Wore* is his first memoir. One would have thought that, as bookshops continue to be laid waste by what even publishers now call the "memoir tsunami", he would have had at least half a dozen out by now. Nonetheless, he has had a good idea that no one has done before. As Tony Parsons helpfully tells us on the front cover, this is "the *Fever Pitch* of urban street fashion".

Elms claims to have been obsessed by clothes almost since birth. In his introduction he describes in almost pornographic detail the petrol-blue mohair suit his older brother came home in when Elms was five. From there he embraces almost every urban working-class fashion movement of the 60s, 70s and 80s: skinhead; soul boy; punk; New Romantic; and thousands of other tiny gradations in between. Being Elms, of course, he is always among the first to adopt these styles, and the first to abandon them, especially when members of the hated middle class catch on. And just at the moment when youth cults start splintering into irrelevance, so Elms abandons them altogether and discovers the merits of a truly well-made suit.

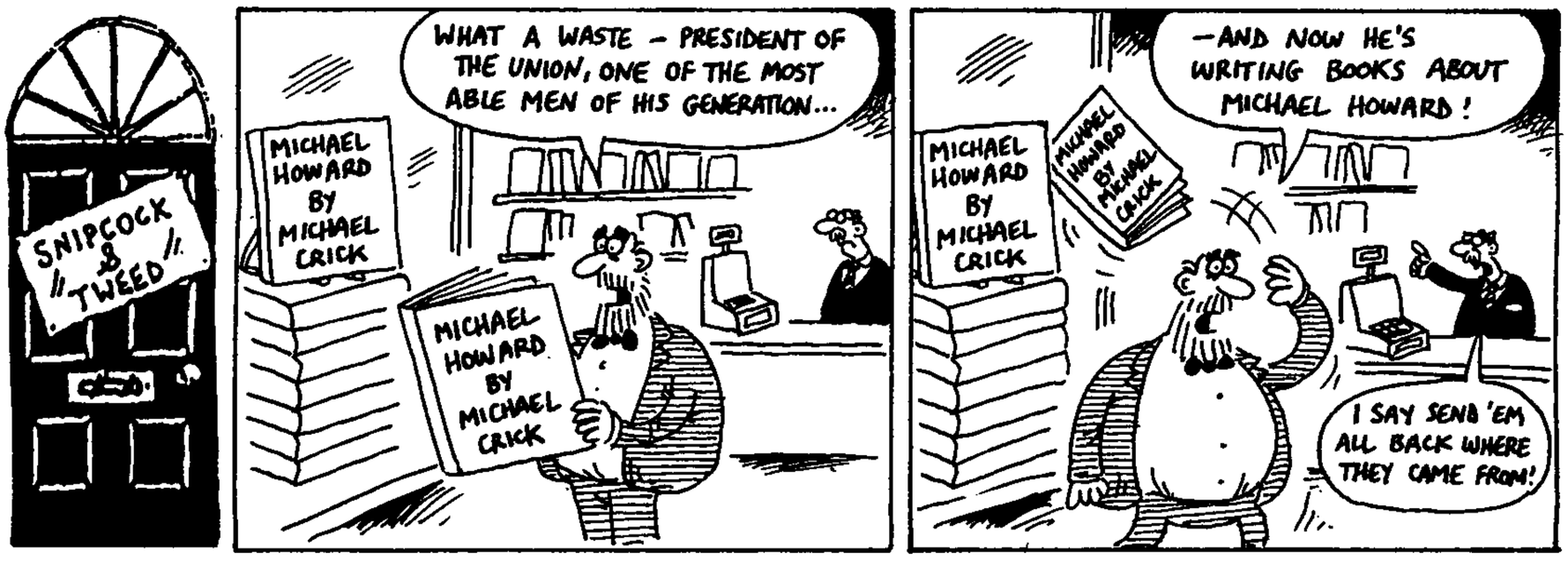
True, he admits he has made sartorial mistakes over the years; but nowhere near as many as you have; and his were much more entertaining than yours anyway. There's no point trying to compete: Elms has crossed the finishing line before anybody else heard the starting pistol.

Give him credit, though: he is very good on the clothes. There's no doubt he knows his onions. Whole pages can be expended on descriptions of a single pair of trousers. Another of Elms's chums, the designer Paul Smith, is also quoted on the cover: "If I could write (which I can't) and had to write a book about clothes, this would be it."

In truth there is the kernel here of a genuinely interesting book, because Elms's attention to sartorial detail and understanding of the various subcultures are second to none. But when he is writing on any other subject at all, Elms comes unstuck. The compulsion to show off, the disinclination to do any research (only Elms could start a sentence with "There's some unbelievable statistic I can no longer quite recall..."), the glib phrasemaking, the working-class sentimentality ("Aunt Glad, whose eyes shone to the last"), the endless use of words like "passion" and "iconography" and "totemic"... well, you can see why everyone wanted to beat him up when he was young. (Elms thought it was the clothes he was wearing.)

At one stage he even admits that going to grammar school "perhaps partly accounted for the confidence bordering on (and often ambling firmly into) arrogance which has always been part of my personality." Which itself makes you wonder. Does this rampant egomania actually mask a lack of self-confidence, which stupid clothes have been attempting to conceal from the rest of the population for nearly 40 years?

There's something very odd about his total absence of modesty, his need to have been the first to do everything, his tendency to universalise personal experience (if Elms thought or did something, "everyone" was thinking or doing the same thing). In years to come, psychologists may come to read this as a set text of self-delusion and mental fragility. It's unlikely that many other people will read it, though, at least outside a large, orbital motorway somewhere in the south-east of England.


SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WHAT A WASTE – PRESIDENT OF THE UNION, ONE OF THE MOST ABLE MEN OF HIS GENERATION...
MICHAEL HOWARD BY MICHAEL CRICK
MICHAEL HOWARD BY MICHAEL CRICK
–AND NOW HE'S WRITING BOOKS ABOUT MICHAEL HOWARD!
MICHAEL HOWARD BY MICHAEL CRICK
MICHAEL HOWARD BY MICHAEL CRICK
I SAY SEND 'EM ALL BACK WHERE THEY CAME FROM!

LIBRARY NEWS

■ THE Science Museum's threat to break up its extraordinary library because of under-funding was put into some perspective by reports of financial waste by the museum's generously paid bigwigs.

The Science Museum's collection includes manuscripts and first editions of works by scientists including Galileo and Einstein. But a letter published in the *Telegraph* earlier this month from Lord Waldegrave, chairman of trustees, claimed the museum can no longer afford to pay Imperial College the service charge for housing the library. The museum already owes £200,000 to Imperial and Lord Waldegrave said the museum faced financial crisis unless it got a huge rise in its annual grant.

Staff from the National Museum of Science and Industry (NMSI), the quango that runs the Science Museum and several museums in the north, believe funds are being wasted on expensive perks for bosses. In a letter to the department of culture, media and sport they point out that museum director Dr Lindsay Sharp is the eighth highest paid quangocrat in the country. As well as his £158,000 salary, Sharp has a flat in the museum's Dana Centre in South Kensington (for which he pays some rent and where his wife has a kiln in the basement, valued by the national audit office at £1,500 a year).

Staff who went on strike over their own pay and conditions in February say the NMSI executive committee, all handsomely paid, are also racking up vast expenses for swanky hand-held computers when much cheaper systems are available. Lord Waldegrave and fellow trustees plan to investigate the finances further. He might start by talking to the workers.

FIRST DRAFTS

Julia pulled on her puffball skirt and leg warmers. "Sobranie Cocktail, Winston?" she said, handing him a cigarette
Pearsall

George Orwell 1984

AD NAUSEAM

A FURTHER casualty of MG Rover's recent collapse was its eagerly-awaited new ad campaign, through St Lukes.

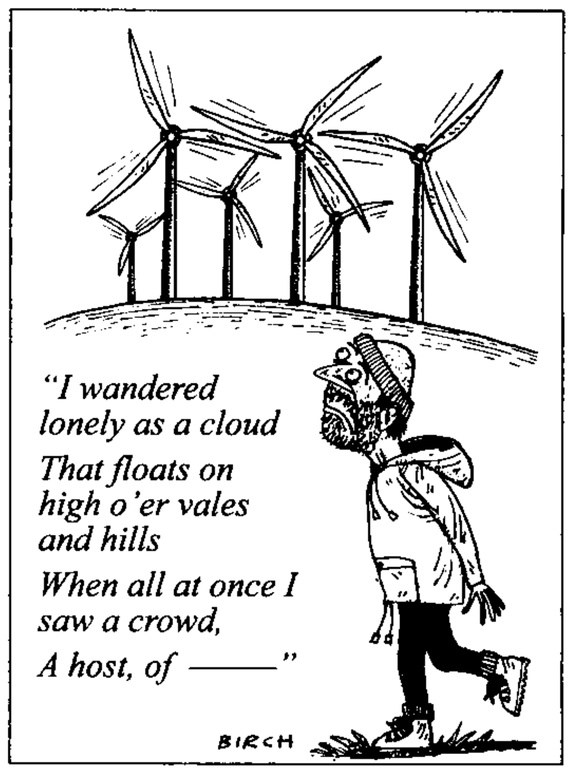
A crying shame that it never made it to our screens – the slot was called "Meltdown" and featured a nuclear power plant disintegrating. In the ad the plant's collapse turns out to be a false alarm. If only it'd been so at Longbridge...

LABOUR's employment of Oscar-winning director Anthony Minghella to direct Tony and Gordon's cuddle-on-the-couch raised a few eyebrows. But a quick glance at Minghella's last advertisement might explain why he was hired.

The ad was for Guinness and featured a fugitive from justice looking for rehabilitation, locked in a battle of wills with an uncontrollable dark horse. The criminal learns to let the horse run free, so that he can gain its trust. Then, by appearing to be friendly, he is able to control it and rides off into the sunset. Gordon might want to get himself a copy.

WHEN the self-styled adland guru Mark Wnek began a column in *The Independent* back in October, *Eye* 1118 noted two things: that Simon Kelner, editor of the *Independent*, is godfather to Wnek's son, and that "from day one [Wnek] has been schmoozing potential employers with the kind of charm and finesse that few recall from his agency days."

On 13 December 2004, for example, Wnek's column was simply a list of "the movers and shakers in adland you really need to know about." This gilded assembly happened to include Adrian Holmes, the creative head of Lowe Worldwide, and Tony Wright, the "new young boss" of Lowe Worldwide.



Last week it was announced that Wnek is to become chairman and chief creative officer of… Lowe's in the US. He was appointed by a certain Tony Wright. On a brighter note, this should at least mean the end of his column, which has now served its purpose.

LUVVIES

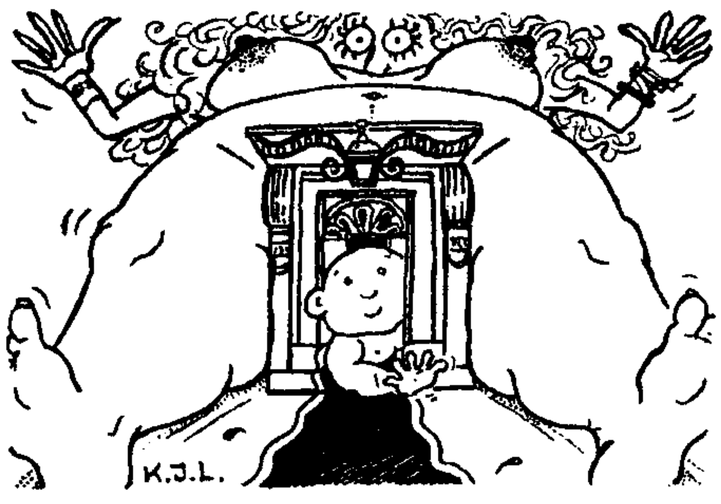
"I do smaller films, though I will make a fourth 'Die Hard' in 2006. We have a great script for that. I like to work; I want to work. Ben Kingsley said something that stuck with me. He said actors are like gladiators. No matter what, you put on the armor, go out to the arena and fight again."

BRUCE WILLIS
LA Times

Submitted by Mike Emery.

This collection will work from the premise that public toilets, far from being banal or simply functional, are highly charged spaces, shaped by notions of propriety, hygiene and the binary gender division. Indeed, public toilets are among the very few openly segregated spaces in contemporary Western culture, and the physical differences between 'gentlemen' and 'ladies' remains [sic] central to (and is further naturalized by) their design. As such they provide a fertile ground for critical work interrogating how conventional assumptions about the body, sexuality and privacy and technology can be formed in public space and inscribed through design.

Call for contributions for a book to be entitled *Toilet Papers: The Gendered Construction of Public Toilets*, Olga Gershenson and Barbara Penner, eds



I get up to leave. 'I'll show you out a different way,' she says. We walk through an atrium painted in pale pink, with huge silver doors

Pseuds Corner

leading out of her flat. 'I designed it myself,' she says. 'It represents the womb. The door are the labia, and this' – she points to the corridor – 'is the birth canal.'

JANE FONDA, interviewed by Emma Brockes, *Guardian*

I thought first of the next pope. I've often noticed how bishops, of all Christian denominations, have never read Adam Smith, but know intuitively that they disagree with him. My first thought, therefore, was that I might send a copy of The Wealth of Nations as an inaugural present to the next pope, whoever he might be.

WILLIAM REES-MOGG
The Times

I'd say our friendship was pretty deep, sure. We're there for one another, and when she had malaria this one time, I went round to her parents' house to visit, to make her feel good. She was really sick, like comatose, so I went to the corner store with just a couple of my bodyguards, and I bought her some stuff to make her laugh: self-raising flour to raise her spirits, and some women's products, but really big ones, the size of mattresses! That's our kind of humour, you know? It's really funny.

MARIAH CAREY on her friendship with Jasmine Dotiwala, *Independent on Sunday*

This lecture will explore the 'chairness' of chairs. Chair typologies because of their generic familiarity allow formal investigation of abstract and social values directly through the visual and structural language of the objects themselves.

'Form Follows Idea', inaugural Lincoln Academy Lecture to be given by Professor Maxine Naylor at the University of Lincoln

Pseuds Educational

Promoting Equality & Diversity

The Coloured Pencils are our agreed cross college image for Equality and Diversity that we use to promote issues within newsletters, booklets and posters.

The pencils signify difference. They are all pencils but some are different colours, different shapes, different lengths etc. We therefore celebrate the fact that we are all different.

Hull College Equality & Diversity Newsletter

CONTRIBUTORS: Geoff Bunn, William Wallace, George McNally, T.S. Brown, Anon, Yarky

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

MG ROVER

HEWITT PUDDING

TO THE sound of stable doors being shut, trade secretary Patricia Hewitt's response to the MG Rover collapse has been to excoriate the Phoenix directors and launch an inquiry by accountancy regulators.

The investigation will look at where the money went and why the company's auditor, Deloitte and Touche, gave the accounts clean audit certificates for years despite doubts now emerging about whether the car maker was in fact solvent.

As many commentators have pointed out, however, at least some of the blame belongs at the door of the trade secretary herself who, along with the "automotive unit" within the DTI, for years failed to act on the mounting problems.

So if Hewitt hasn't been keeping an eye on manufacturing industry, what *has* she been doing since taking the job in 2001? In a period that has seen the Equitable and Shell scandals here and Enron, Worldcom and many others in the US, her main achievements have been to soften the consequences for directors and auditors when they fail to do their jobs properly.

After heavy lobbying from industry, last year's companies act allowed directors to get their firms, ie shareholders, to pay the costs of defending them against legal action of the sort that Towers and co might eventually face. Another company law bill, published last month, will enable auditors to negotiate "proportionate" liability with their clients, limiting the compensation a dodgy auditor has to pay to shareholders, workers and pensioners when a company goes down the tubes.

A similar rule was introduced in the US 10 years ago and is widely thought to have contributed to the decline in auditing standards that led to all the Enron-type scandals. But again after intense lobbying and some minor concessions from the bean-counters, Hewitt decided that auditors' liabilities here should be eased.

But in contrast to a tough stance adopted by American regulators, Hewitt also failed to take any action on another crucial factor in several failed audits – the conflicts of interest that arise when auditors also earn consultancy fees from the companies whose books they are supposed to be checking. (Deloitte and Touche, incidentally, received many times its audit fee in payments from MG Rover for "other services" in the years leading up to the company's collapse.)

Having given her friends in business what they want for the past four years Hewitt, surveying the wreckage of MG Rover, is left appealing to the greedy directors' better nature: "I hope they will make a personal contribution towards supporting the workforce." If it's anything like her own personal contribution to reining in boardroom excess, the workforce had better not hold its breath.

PFI NEWS

The National Wealth Service

STAFF at the Norfolk & Norwich hospital, one of the first NHS PFI schemes, have voted to strike because their wages are stagnating while their new private employer is part of a consortium that has pocketed a multi-million pound windfall.

Around 430 cleaners, porters, catering and other staff took the vote after health secretary John Reid announced new NHS salary scales in his "Agenda for Change". These included a basic minimum rate of £5.69 an hour. However, because the Norfolk & Norwich workers were handed over to the private contractor Serco as part of the PFI scheme four years ago, they are stuck on the national minimum wage of £4.85 an hour.

The Agenda for Change salaries are merely "optional" – and it's an option Serco has so far opted out of. Unison members at the Norfolk & Norwich believe Serco could easily opt in if it wanted to as it is part of the Octagon private consortium that runs the hospital and which earned an extra £100m after refinancing its deal.

Running the hospital for the NHS has not been such a risky business for Octagon after all. As the government was unlikely suddenly to close the hospital, Octagon was able to rearrange its loans at better rates and gain the massive windfall.

Serco supposedly paid lower wages than the NHS because that was all it could afford. But its share of the refinancing by the consortium, which includes John Laing and Barclays, was £4.1m, and its overall profits have jumped 10 percent to £74m, mostly through public sector contracts. It would take a Serco worker with Octagon around 50 years to earn the £569,018 annual salary enjoyed by Serco chief executive Chris Hyman.

Around 150 new members joined Unison after the ballot and the strike has been delayed pending talks. Helpfully, under the PFI the hospital trust itself has no control whatsoever over the pay of its workers.

P.S. This "two-tier workforce" in the public services *should* be a thing of the past. It's official end was announced at the Welsh Labour conference last month by none other than... the Prime Minister. No wonder it hasn't happened.

Phoenix rights

WHILE many staff at Inventures, the failed NHS property PFI, face redundancy or early retirement, there is better news for executive David Lawrence. The department of health is paying him while he submits a new business proposition to the department.

Inventures was supposed to transform the old NHS Estates into an exciting new property management business (see The Priestley's Tale, *Eye* 1126). But the scheme failed and NHS Estates will now close. As the national audit office (NAO) noted, some Inventures managers acted in a way that was "not good practice". In particular, chief operating officer Lawrence and chair Kate Priestley attended the meeting where their preferred private sector partner was picked; and top Inventures staff also seemed to be lined up for bonuses if the PFI went through. However, even with these efforts the PFI fell apart.

The latest *Inventures Team Brief* newsletter is full of news of "the final phase of our closure programme", including the early retirement, redeployment and severance schemes. But Lawrence has a more upbeat message, announcing that: "I am stepping side from the management of the current Inventures business to negotiate a proposal I have submitted to DH [The Department of Health]. Many staff will know that I hope to set up a new business and I have agreed to step aside to ensure transparency and to avoid possible conflicts of interest while the negotiations take place."

The *Eye* asked the health department if it was still paying Lawrence his salary while he negotiated this new business with the government. We also asked what service he intended to sell the NHS, and whether he would take over any Inventures work. These questions received no answer, but a spokesperson said: "The department of health is satisfied that all formal policies and procedures have been followed and any conflicts of interest have been managed."

Absolutely Barking

THE fastest-growing area for the private finance initiative is the NHS local improvement finance trust (LIFT) programme. Under this primary care trusts (PCTs) get to rent health centres and GP surgeries for 25 or 30 years from companies owned mainly by the private firms and banks behind them.

The arrangement presents a lucrative opportunity for financiers; but if the story behind one project in Essex is anything to go by, well-positioned NHS staff can do very nicely out of it too.

Among the largest LIFT deals to date is the £87m contract awarded jointly by the Barking and Dagenham and Havering PCTs for the building and refurbishment of several community health facilities. The lucrative contract attracted a number of bids, from which three consortia were shortlisted in November 2002. Six months later the lucky "preferred bidder" emerged as the Primera consortium, a joint venture between Barclays private equity and Scottish builder, Miller.

The deal was signed in December 2003, with Primera setting up a special company ("Liftco") to build, own and run the facilities, in which it would own 60 percent of the shares while the rest went equally to the NHS and Partnerships for Health (a joint venture between the department of health and Partnerships UK, the government's privatised PFI promoter).

There would be nothing unusual about this PFI tale were it not for the fortunes of the PCTs' project director, Sue Lees, whose job it was to run the bidding process in the interests of the trusts. No sooner had the ink dried on the contract than she was seconded to Liftco as chief executive, in which position she was so effective that 12 months later, in January this year, she was awarded the job permanently without the post being advertised.

The *Eye* asked the man responsible for the appointment, Miller's PFI director Robin Scowcroft, if he thought that the person controlling the negotiation for the NHS immediately being given a job with the company controlled by the winning bidder might compromise the bidding and contracting process and whether there might be a conflict of interest between Lees' roles.

"Absolutely not," he said; she was "the best person for the job" and such a move was "all part of the ethos of these things". He insisted that despite the control exercised by his firm and the profits going to it, Ms Lees acted as much in the NHS's interests as in Miller's.

The national audit office (NAO) professes to be concerned with potential conflicts of interests in PFI projects, but the public spending watchdog appears to find Miller's Barking LIFT deal a model contract. In June the NAO will host a PFI conference where the assembled suits will listen to a talk on "New forms of relationship – the NHS LIFT experience" from... Sue Lees and Robin Scowcroft.

ASPERGER SYNDROME

Anti-social services

IT IS hard to envisage more ignorant or unsympathetic treatment by the "caring professions" than that meted out to the Storey family of Rayleigh, Essex.

Debbie Storey, 41, has Asperger Syndrome (AS), as do her sons Ben, 16, and Sam, 12. AS is a form of autism where sufferers often have high IQs but lack social and communication skills. This can seen in apparently "odd" behaviour.

Last year Ben and Sam were nearly taken into care because a therapist who had been visiting the Storey home decided – without being qualified to do so – that the children were being psychologically abused. Nothing could have been further from the truth. But a confidential report prepared for Essex social services concluded that Mr and Mrs Storey were "consciously or unconsciously using their children to meet their own needs". They were summoned to a child protection conference and the boys were put on the "at risk" register for emotional abuse and neglect.

In what was subsequently found to be only one of a series of failures by the authorities, no input was sought from any expert on autism to throw more light on the condition of Mrs Storey and her sons. Lisa Blakemore-Brown, a psychologist and expert on Asperger's, was so horrified by what was happening to the family she even gate-crashed a case conference to act as a family advocate. She found the intimidation of the family "absolutely unbelievable and unacceptable".

After a mammoth battle with Essex county council involving lawyers and various experts, Ben and Sam Storey were eventually removed from the "at risk" register last September. But the year-long ordeal took an enormous toll on everyone, especially Mrs Storey.

In emails she revealed the depth of anxiety and desperation she felt throughout the period. In March last year, for example, she wrote: "They are ripping my family to pieces and there isn't anyone who can intervene at a higher level and stop the damage this is doing to the children.

"Ben is really unwell with all the flu symptoms again that flare up when he is under immense stress… but thanks to the core group [*those monitoring the children*] we're too afraid to take him to a GP who has blatant disregard for experts and is totally ignorant to the needs of a family dealing with autism… This is spiralling out of control and I'm rapidly going with it."

But it was not just her mental health that was suffering. According to Debbie's mother Rosemary, Debbie had been fatigued and feeling unwell for some time but was too fearful to go to the doctor lest this was interpreted as more "attention seeking behaviour" that could harm her chances of keeping the children.

She had complained of increased back pain in the middle of last year and in November was referred to the Royal Orthopaedic hospital for spine and hip investigations. No cause for the pain could be found. Instead, according to Rosemary, questions were asked about whether Asperger's could have affected Debbie's *perception* of pain.

Later in November the pain was so bad it was frequently causing Debbie to vomit. A GP at her practice prescribed slow-release morphine to ease the pain, but another GP took her off it. At one stage she was in such pain she dialled 999 and was taken to casualty at Southend Hospital. After two painkilling injections she was sent home. But she was then readmitted to hospital by her GP when blood tests revealed worryingly low levels of haemoglobin. Again she was discharged.

It was only in March of this year that, on mother Rosemary's suggestion, Debbie was seen by the consultant who was treating her brother for a rare renal cancer. It turned out that Debbie's "perception" of pain was all too horribly real. She too was diagnosed with rare renal cancer, only hers had spread to other parts of her body.

While her husband Michael now cares for Ben and Sam, Debbie is being nursed by her parents and awaiting an operation to remove a kidney on 4 May.

Because she is so seriously ill, an advocate from Mencap has written to the respective health authorities, the Southend Hospital NHS trust and Castle Point Health Trust, to question and complain about her treatment. But Lisa Blakemore-Brown has no doubt that the labels attached in ignorance to Debbie and her family over the years mean she has not received the kind of treatment and care she needed when she needed it. "What has happened to Debbie and her family should not be ignored. We have seen over the last seven years more and more cases of parents being wrongly blamed and their real needs ignored. In this case a completely unqualified person set a rumour running that then permeated the entire health, education and social work systems, blinding the professionals. This resulted in no support for the children, no recognition of their condition – and a mother fighting for her life."

POLICE COMPLAINTS

Singh and dance

AN ASIAN police constable has been given the go-ahead to take his trade union, the Metropolitan Police Federation, to an employment tribunal in a test case over its alleged failure to support his claim for racial discrimination and victimisation against Scotland Yard.

Eye readers may recall that last year PC Palbinder Singh received compensation and an apology from the Met over trumped up disciplinary charges made against him. Following the cases of Gurpal Virdi and Ali Desai (*Eyes passim*), this was just the latest instance of Inspector Knacker wasting vast amounts of time and money wrongly pursuing ethnic minority police officers.

PC Singh is now pursuing the federation for discrimination over its failure to represent or fund him during his lengthy proceedings against the Met. He claims the federation decided he had less than a 50 percent chance of winning and refused to fund his case before it had obtained the full facts.

He cited the case of two white officers who had complained of race discrimination when their expenses were scrutinized and an Asian colleague's were not. They were assisted throughout by the federation. He also claimed the federation made improper judgements about his actions in response to the Met's treatment of him, rather than looking at the conduct of his bosses.

Federation lawyers have tried to have the case struck out and endeavored to force PC Singh to put down a hefty legal fee deposit. But this has been rejected by the employment tribunal which has ordered a full hearing in June.

WHISTLEBLOWING

Ailing Hayling

A DEPUTY head teacher and Ofsted inspector has won six-figure compensation after being hounded out of her job for blowing the whistle on alleged financial irregularities at a Hampshire comprehensive.

Hampshire county council recently agreed to pay the undisclosed sum to Ann Power following an employment tribunal. It heard that after reporting concerns about the school's book-keeping to the chair of the governors, Mrs Power was accused of lying, was demoted and then publicly humiliated.

The head of Hayling School, Max Bullough, also wrote a damning report for the education authority in which he expressed serious reservations about Mrs Power's competence and integrity and stated that he could no longer support her work for Ofsted.

The tribunal rejected entirely Mr Bullough's claim that this was merely a "provisional" finding designed to elicit a response from Mrs Power. It ruled that his "devastating indictment" had made her position untenable and had been a direct response to her whistleblowing.

Mrs Power's case raises more questions than it answers. For the tribunal heard that she went to the chair of the school governors with allegations that had originated with her predecessor as deputy head, Roderick James. Before he left to take up a new job, he told Mrs Power that occasionally she might be asked by the school bursar, Roger Evans, "to sign cheques in circumstances where she would not know what the payment was for and would not be able to find any specific references to in the published records of the school finances." Nor indeed would the governors.

When Mrs Power asked him to explain why he had not raised the matter himself, he claimed that he needed good references for his new headship applications and did not want to take on the school bursar.

When acting as head in Mr Bullough's absence, Mrs Power received complaints about finances from school department heads, and she decided to confide in the chair of governors, Janet Coates-Jones. A new governor with financial experience was signed on and Mrs Power was advised not to sign any cheques without knowing what they were for.

A few months later Mrs Coates-Jones told Mrs Power that the accounts had been successfully audited and her investigation closed. But the tribunal noted that Mrs Coates-Jones had *not* told the auditors of the allegations that had been made by Mr James. Nor was Mr Bullough informed about them until Mrs Power told him.

The news triggered a grievance procedure brought by Mr Evans, and supported by Mr Bullough, against Mrs Power. But the governing body appeal committee found that she had acted in good faith and rejected Mr Evans's claim that she was dishonest.

As the tribunal noted, Mrs Power's predecessor Mr James, "despite being given opportunities to do so… has never specifically denied" what Mrs Power reported he had told her.

Many questions still remain. Why, for example, did neither Hampshire county council or anyone else order an independent audit or investigation into the claims? Why were the council auditors not told of the allegations? And what action was taken against the head for the school's unlawful treatment of a whistleblower?

Hampshire county council declined to answer, saying only: "This complex case which has been ongoing for the past four years has now concluded with the tribunal ruling and settlement to Ann Power, and it is inappropriate to make any further comment on this case, other than to say The Hayling School continues to make very good progress, offering pupils a quality education." Meanwhile Max Bullough remains head teacher, Janet Coates-Jones remains chair of the governors and Roger Evans is now business manager of the school. Roderick James, who first blew the whistle to Mrs Power, is head of a school in Penzance. And Mrs Power, who did her duty as a deputy head and an Ofsted inspector, lost her health, her career and her reputation.

In the Back continues overleaf

OPERATION GOLDFINCH

Trawling for the truth?

THE recent failure by a 63-year-old father to overturn his conviction for sexually abusing boys at a care home more than 30 years earlier has raised fresh concerns about so-called police "trawling" operations.

Tony Burke was jailed for eight-and-a-half years at Cardiff crown court in December 2001 for abusing three boys at what was then Cardiff's Penhill assessment centre in 1970 and 1971. The allegations against the teacher emerged during Operation Goldfinch in which police tracked down those who had been in care and asked if they had been abused.

Now in their 40s, the former residents said Burke had befriended them and committed serious sexual acts on them. But at both his trial and appeal, his lawyers argued that the passage of time meant he could not get a fair trial. Crucial documentary evidence – such as staff rotas – which might provide him with an alibi had disappeared or been destroyed. And key witnesses, other members of staff, were dead.

Although the appeal judges found that the absence of "crucial documents" on one charge prevented Burke, a father of three with no previous convictions, from having a fair trial, they ruled that the loss of staff rotas did not have the same importance in relation to the other charges. They also dismissed Burke's claim about the lack of witnesses. "Given the evidence of the complainants that the abuse took place in the absence of other persons, the unavailability of these potential witnesses is not a reason for staying the proceedings," they said.

However, according to David Woods, Burke's solicitor at appeal, both may have supported Burke's defence that he rarely worked at night when the offences were alleged to have occurred. "The difficulty in these cases is that it is very easy to make such allegations but very difficult to refute them," said Wood. "Public sympathy is with the complainant, who is termed 'victim' before the issue of guilt is even determined. Also, the cases rely on force of numbers because not one of these allegations in themselves can really stand up because there is no independent corroboration."

Burke was convicted in the very month that Lord Woolf, the lord chief justice, admitted that police trawling operations, coupled with the promise of compensation for victims, may have led to injustices.

A year later, in 2002, the Commons home affairs select committee which had examined police trawling cases, recognised the "onerous task" faced by defence teams in such cases. "In most trials, the principal evidence is testimonial, with little – if any – medical or other objective evidence to go on," it stated. "Memories have generally faded, potential witnesses may be dead or untraceable, crucial social services' or care home records may have been lost or destroyed."

It concluded: "Set in the context of a growing compensation culture and a shift in the law of 'similar fact' evidence, the risks of effecting a miscarriage of justice in these cases are said to be unusually high."

The question of compensation, says David Woods, may be Burke's only hope of getting the criminal cases review commission to look at his case.

He said that it became apparent at the appeal that the three complainants who initially did not appear interested in compensation have now applied for it. Only the CCRC might be able to obtain the compensation documents to compare the claims with those made in police statements.

None of this means that all former care home workers and teachers accused as the result of a "trawl" are innocent; nor that all former residents decide so many years down the line to "make it up". Far from it. The question is whether the justice system can guarantee it has locked up the right people.

COUNTRYSIDE PROPERTIES

Tangled websites

MORE NEWS from Countryside Properties, which prides itself on "creating a positive legacy for the future".

Eye 1129 reported that Countryside's plans to build 650 homes and a children's nursery on the site of the world's largest asbestos textile factory in Rochdale were put on hold after the *Eye* demonstrated that the site was badly contaminated by asbestos. While the local "Save Spodden Valley" campaign continues to highlight bad practice by the developers, Countryside has found a canny way to put across its side of the story – by setting up web addresses very similar to those of the local campaign and linking them to the CP website.

Jason Addy, who runs the protesters' website (spodden-valley.co.uk) was shocked to discover that a series of similar addresses had been created (savespoddenvalley.co.uk, savespoddenvalley.com, spoddenvalley.co.uk and spoddenvalley.com). They all directed users to Countryside Properties' own website. Countryside insists that, far from being an attempt to confuse the public and sabotage its opponents, the sites were just part of CP's "public information campaign" and that the purchase of the addresses was part of a "holding procedure" while another website (spoddenvalleyr egeneration.co.uk) was created with links to both the campaigners' and CP's sites. Top internet boffins consulted by the *Eye* say that this is what is known, technically, as "bollocks".

When Jason Addy filed a complaint about Countryside's actions to internet watchdog Nominet, the "holding" websites were withdrawn. All very strange. But then, Countryside has behaved strangely in the past – not least by denying the presence of asbestos in Spodden Valley in the first place.

ACCOUNTANCY

The expert's experts

ERNST & YOUNG's choice of "expert witness" in its battle with Equitable Life comes as no surprise to students of dodgy insurance company accounts.

Bean-counters from KPMG will take the stand to testify that their E&Y brethren were not negligent in failing to alert Equitable to the guaranteed annuity liabilities that eventually blew an enormous hole in the life insurer's finances and its policyholders' payouts.

Success for E&Y would coincidentally be very helpful to KPMG in the latter's defence of a claim from the liquidators of one of its old audit clients, Independent Insurance. The company collapsed in 2001 after, Equitable-like, failing to make sufficient reserves for the claims it faced from policyholders. KPMG, just like E&Y in the Equitable case, stands accused of negligently failing to spot the discrepancies (and is also being investigated by the accountancy profession's joint disciplinary scheme, as is E&Y).

The liquidator of Independent is PricewaterhouseCoopers, whose case against KPMG would be bolstered by an Equitable victory against E&Y. And who are the expert witnesses to be deployed by Equitable to say that E&Y was negligent in its audits? You've guessed it – PwC.

All testimony from the expert accountants will of course be entirely objective and uninfluenced by the potential implications for their firms and, as they are partners in those same firms, their own pockets.

WOMAN IN THE EYE

BARBARA JUDGE

MORE ON Barbara Judge, who on April fools' day was given yet another government job by trade secretary Patricia Hewitt.

This time Judge was appointed to the board of the department of trade and industry with responsibility for "performance monitoring". Given her track record, her own performance is worth monitoring too.

Judge is a former board member of News International and deputy chair of Friends Provident. In January last year Hewitt appointed her deputy chair of the financial reporting council and in July the DTI made her chair of the atomic energy authority (AEA). In May she was appointed to the board of the department of constitutional affairs.

As the *Eye* pointed out when Judge got the AEA job (see issue 1113), under her leadership Friends Provident was fined £450,000 for mis-selling pensions and £675,000 for mis-selling endowment mortgages. But she has a longer history of fines too.

In the US she had to pay a $90,000 (£50,000) fine to settle a court case because of her involvement in a massive American financial scandal in 1992.

The money was her contribution to a fund for savers who were ruined when Lincoln Savings & Loan collapsed.

Savings & Loans were America's equivalent of British building societies: safe places for small investors to put their cash. But when George Bush Snr "deregulated" them, executives promptly awarded themselves massive pay rises and invested in dubious schemes. Many collapsed in a massive, Enron-like scandal.

Charles Keating, head of Lincoln Savings & Loan, served four years in prison for the fraud which left 21,000 mostly elderly investors with nothing and the US government with a billion-dollar compensation bill.

Judge paid her contribution to the fine under her previous name of Barbara Thomas: she became Barbara Judge when she left America following the court case and married former Conservative party chairman Sir Paul Judge.

During the US court case it was alleged that she had helped Keating. As a former official of the American financial watchdog, the securities and exchange commission (SEC), she had approached her old employer seeking information on an SEC investigation of Lincoln and had tried to tell the regulators that Keating was a good egg.

She also approached Shannon Fairbanks, a friend with a senior position at the Home Loan Bank Board, another financial regulator which oversaw the Savings & Loans banks, and asked for inside information on the regulators' pending audit of Lincoln because Keating was "particularly concerned" about the investigation. At the time she had $250,000 worth of unsecured credit from Lincoln at a favourable rate: she only had to pay interest once a year on the debt. She was also seeking a job on the board of Lincoln, and had previously legally represented the firm. All her work on behalf of Keating meant Judge was added to the lawsuit brought by former investors in Lincoln over the collapse, and thus had to contribute to the settlement.

The DTI refused to say if ministers knew of Judge's role in the Lincoln scandal but suggested that she has "considerable business experience" and was appointed "through open competition under Nolan rules".

Private Eye is delighted to announce the inaugural

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For further information, please speak to Ben Tisdall at Midas PR. Tel: 020 7584 7474.

*Submissions will be accepted for anything that has appeared in a newspaper, magazine or on a website, but no broadcast material will be eligible.

In the City

THE ever-growing scandal surrounding "Hank" Greenberg, deposed boss of American International Group (AIG), the world's biggest insurer he created, has eerie echoes of previous City scandals, one from more than 20 years ago and two much more recent. Yet they seem to have caught American regulators by surprise. They also highlight a murky area of the insurance world that clearly requires closer attention in the US, Britain and elsewhere.

AIG used companies in Barbados, Bermuda and Panama to provide reinsurance and incentives for directors. Offshore reinsurance companies owned by directors of a public company that donates reinsurance policies that generate generous premiums and few if any claims, thereby building a tax-free cash pile for those directors to dip in to whenever, is what the Lloyd's scandals of the early 80s involving Minet and Alexander Howden were all about.

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More significant are the revelations about financial or finite reinsurance policies used to boost profits and balance sheets by hiding or deferring claims and so slashing provisions or increasing reserves. These weapons of mass deception were first discovered in the City in 2001. They had been used from 1999 by Equitable Life, which almost collapsed in 2000; and by Independent Insurance which crashed in 2001.

AIG did its $500m financial reinsurance business in 2000 with General Re, a key subsidiary of the Sage of Omaha Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway empire. Independent and Equitable did their funny business with the Irish European and ERC offshoots of GE Capital.

All three reinsurance companies are based in Dublin, one of the world's top reinsurance centres. Dublin has gained on offshore havens like Bermuda as a result of low taxes and lax regulation.

To the AIG, Independent and Equitable scandals must also be added the collapse of HIH in Australia, which heavily features finite insurance policies issued by General Re and National Indemnity, another Berkshire Hathaway subsidiary. Two Irish-based senior employees of General Re's aptly named "alternative solutions" division have been banned from doing business in Australia but were left at their Dublin desks by Irish regulators.

American investigators are now probing whether reinsurance documents were doctored in General Re's Dublin office to make the 2000 transaction boosting its reserves appear more beneficial to AIG. Documents were changed to show that instead of AIG paying General Re $5m it received $10m from the reinsurer.

The growing role of the relatively new phenomenon of financial reinsurance in financial scandals is a product of the aggressive sale of what was essentially a new insurance product from the late 90s. Financial reinsurance can be used legally by companies to "smooth" profits by deferring or bringing forward liabilities. However, it was supposed to be clearly flagged and was required to involve a real transfer of risk for claims from the insurer to the reinsurer.

Instead it offered a new tool for those engaged in financial engineering designed to dress up balance sheets. It quickly became a product that appealed to companies already in trouble or wanting to use smoke and mirrors to hide their true financial state from investors and regulators. Which raises the question as to the knowledge and responsibility of those reinsurers who sold those policies about the purposes for which they were being used.

"I have real concerns about the use – or more accurately, the abuse – of reinsurance and its susceptibility to manipulation," declared Justice Neville Owen, who headed the Australian royal commission that investigated the HIH collapse in 1999. The top two HIH executives were jailed earlier this month. One of the charges involved reinsurance with Hannover Re. Three other executives face charges relating to financial reinsurance contracts with General Re bought by FAI just before it was acquired by HIH. The FAI takeover helped to bring down HIH. There is now an investigation into General Re's financial reinsurance activities in Australia.

In the case of both FAI and Equitable, the financial reinsurance contracts were effectively voided by secret side letters which meant that if there were ever a serious claim then the cover was cancelled. This would also seem to be the case with AIG. The effect of such side letters was that there was no real transfer of risk from the company paying the premium to the supposed reinsurer, so no real reinsurance and no real benefit to the balance sheet. Removal of that supposed cover helped propel HIH into bankruptcy, Equitable into closing to new business and, with the offshore arrangements, force AIG into an expected $1bn restatement of its accounts.

Yet what did the reinsurers at General Re, National Indemnity, Irish European, ERC, Hannover Re and Swiss Re (which also did business with HIH) know about the true situations within the companies seeking financial reinsurance? Did they know the purposes for which such reinsurance was used? Did they realise or require that the side agreements which effectively voided the cover were kept secret from auditors and regulators?

Both Equitable's discredited auditors Ernst & Young and the Fundamentally Supine Authority declared on discovering in 2001 the 1999 side letter (which was signed by chief executive Chris Headdon to Irish European and negated the cover that removed £800m in liabilities from its balance sheet) that they would have questioned the life company's solvency.

Reinsurance is all about risk. Reinsurers do not get rich by misjudging risk. They have to know all about the risk before they agree to reinsure and have to be clear about how much risk they are taking and what are the chances that they will have to pay. Financial reinsurance was a product that only really appealed to DMs – desperate men. Yet the reinsurers took the premiums and stayed silent as the companies unravelled presumably on the basis that disclosure was not a matter for them.

The FSA was sufficiently alarmed by the Independent and Equitable scandals that it demanded greater clarity about financial reinsurance three years ago. A year later the HIH royal commission threw more light on this dark corner. Now the US investigations into AIG are expected to increase the pressure for fuller disclosure of the nature of such policies to investors and regulators.

Given the importance of its insurance operations to Berkshire Hathaway and the closeness between Ajit Jain, who runs the insurance side, and the world's greatest investor Warren Buffett, questions about just who knew what about General Re in Dublin is likely to be a matter occupying regulators both in the US and Australia and possibly even at the FSA.

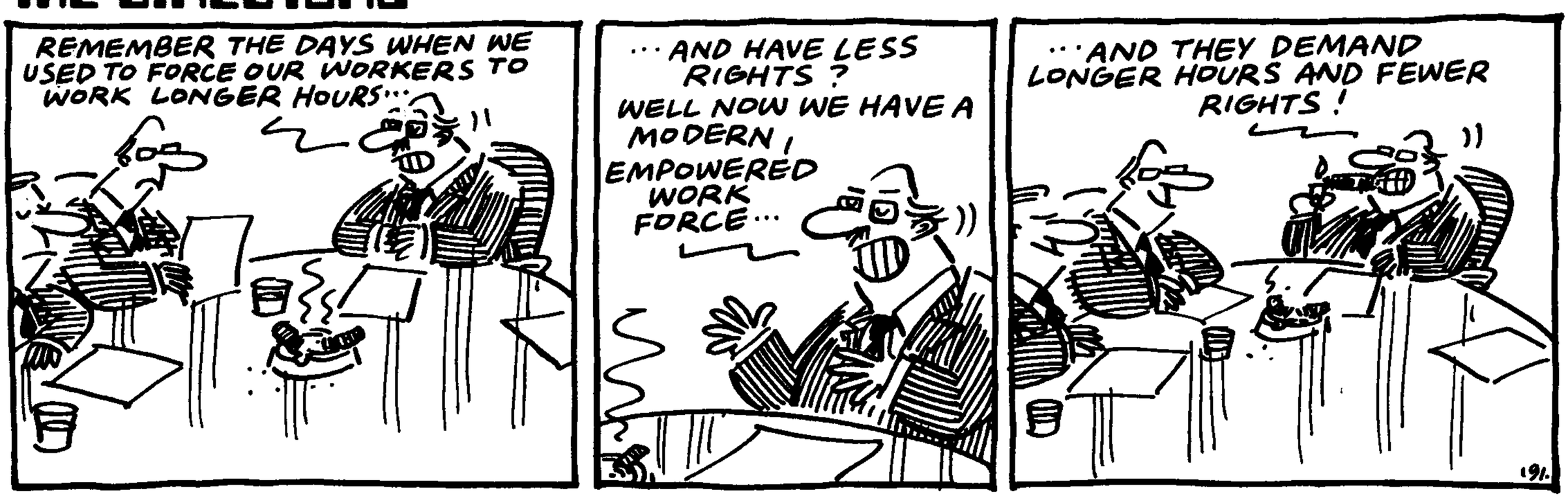
Reinsurers should not be able to pocket the premiums and then walk away from the crash that their policies helped if not create then at the very least to disguise its inevitability. They too have responsibilities above those merely to their bottom line. Sadly this position does not yet seem to have been accepted by those in charge of the reinsurance operations at General Re where John Houldsworth, the British executive named in both the Australian and AIG scandals, is still in place.

ONE of the mysteries of the MG Rover scandal concerns the "trust fund" set up for the directors into which £16.53m was pumped in two years from the loss-making car company: how much more went in last year remains to be seen.

John Towers, leader of the "My Greed" Rover consortium expects this to pay out a pension in excess of £100,000 a year, while the 6,000 Rover workforce may need to make do on a fraction of that amount.

One speculation is that the mysterious "trust fund" about which Towers and friends have been remarkably coy is an offshore employee benefit trust which would be the most tax effective way

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG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'91.

"Er... I've forgotten my PIN number"

for directors of a private company to take care of pension business. EBTs for UK residents are currently under attack from the Inland Revenue because of their tax avoidance elements, especially where they involve offshore trustees who disburse the contents of the fund, often as low interest tax-free loans. The veil surrounding the Phoenix Five's nice little pension earner may well indicate there is an offshore secret.

Towers' defence of the £40m he and his partners have taken out of MG Rover as its losses grew often sounds like Alice in Wonderland logic, especially when it comes to that pension fund. Of course a pension of £100,000 or so is par for the motor industry course if an executive is paid £817,000 a year as Towers was in 2003. But most company directors take a little more than two years to amass a pension pot of £3.6m! Especially when the company made operating losses of £179m in that period.

That this disproportionate pension pot could be created was in many ways due to one of the many pieces of financial engineering for which MG Rover was more famous and original than its cars. In addition to paying BMW £10 to take MG Rover away, Towers and friends also received a £427m dowry from the German car makers, interest free.

That money was paid to Techtronic (2000), the company through which they acquired MG Rover. Later in 2000 Techtronic was acquired by Phoenix Venture Holdings through which Towers and associates thereafter controlled MG Rover and all its assets. That takeover was completed by Phoenix issuing £10m in loan notes to Towers and his three original partners, Peter Beale, John Edwards and Nick Stephenson. These notes were repaid in 2003 after receiving interest of £1.6m.

So how did Phoenix manage to repay £11.6m on the loan notes and contribute £16.5m to the directors' pensions trust fund when in the three years 2001 to 2003 that included these payments it had a negative cash flow from making cars of £466m? Well one way was for Techtronic to charge interest on the BMW loan to group companies and then pay a very generous dividend up to its parent Phoenix Venture Holdings which could then use the cash to pay into trust funds and repay loans.

Techtronic paid dividends of £60.5m in three years to PVH. Its income in that period was only £30.8m, almost all from interest paid to it by group companies for use of the BMW money. But Towers and friends were unrestrained by such limited income. In 2002 and 2003, the years of the big payouts, the dividend Techtronic paid to its parent PVH was increasingly paid out of reserves which in turn relied on the BMW cash. For 2002 profits were £11.4m but the dividend was £18m. For 2003 the numbers were £11.5m and a whopping £32.5m!

So financial engineering and inter-company loans created a cash flow which would not otherwise have been there and which enabled the directors to fill their pockets with almost £30m. Towers insists this was all quite normal and the interest payments went back into MG Rover, not their pockets. The investigations into MG Rover's accounts under Sir Bryan Nicholson and administrators Pricewaterhouse Coopers may disagree.

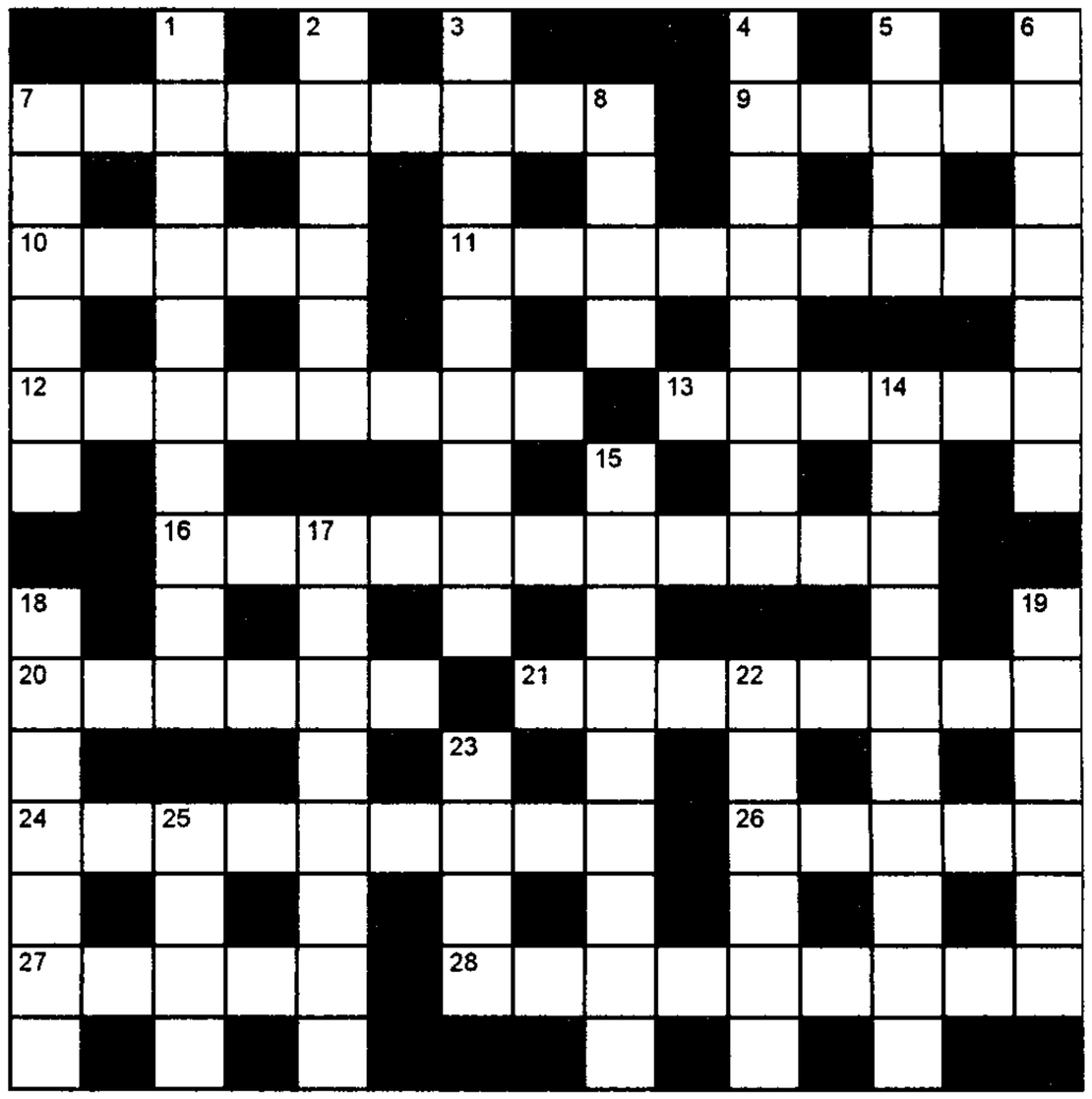
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 286

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 6 May 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Nuts about chamber venues for Ted Heath once (9)

9 Action man's butt next to curvaceous Derek (5)

10 Insinuate he's an OBN candidate (5)

11 Randy, wrecked by Hello! curse – long gone (9)

12/21 Choice oaths increasingly heard from the politician these days (8,8)

13 Nut mangling Monica dropping round about one (6)

16 Conservative leader, awfully patient sod in such an uncomfortable state, no shit (11)

20 Tell tale marriage advisors (6)

21 See 12

24 Exposure of member by Lily? It's most illuminating (9)

26 Get rid of Bush! (5)

27 "Exemplary" Dome's chaotic, laughable opening (5)

28 Such a sexy performer needs to carry own cooling equipment (3,6)

DOWN

1 Censor Porno Dick (4-6)

2 Where a member joins body to provide ammunition to ex-PM outing Thatcher, initially (6)

3 Where to vote for Blair, say, by giving head to Cherie, professionally (4,5)

4 Crafty thing letting off a fart, etc. (8)

5 Brief shot, for instance, of heads of Arsenal mouthing more obscenities (4)

6 Old Russian plonker holding up fool (7)

7 Churchman put down – Margaret has no time for him (6)

8 Dicky is otherwise Cook but without the balls (4)

14 Fashionable revered Royal with Sunday cricketer is right out of favour (2,8)

15 The tosser's deposit-holding institution? (5,4)

17 Perhaps Hazel's cover is cobblers' nightmare (8)

18 Page four shameless Mowlam's a scandalous politician (7)

19 One very contorted bra's pressure line (6)

22 Spare supermodel publicity spies (6)

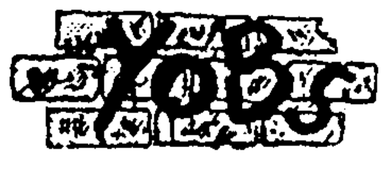
23 Gay, non-PC adman's praise (4)

25 Royal needs date – whatever's around (4)

Crossword 285 winner: MARGERY HERRING

ACROSS: 9 Apologist 10/27 In the tearoom 11/28 A load of balls 12 Angular 13 Angst 14 Royal mint 16 Knees-up 19 Nominee 21 Nut cutlet 24 Negro 26 Learjet 29 Come again.

DOWN: 1 Banana skin 2 So long 3 Hot dates 4 Titfer 5 Steady on 6 Virgil 7 Stallion 8 Peer 15 The Commons 17 Entrails 18 Politics 20 Mandalay 22 Unjust 23 Totems 25 Global 26 Lube.



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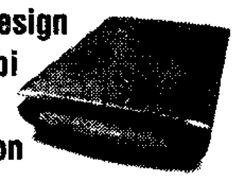

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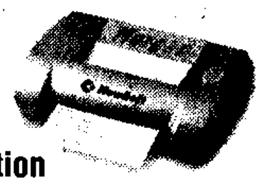

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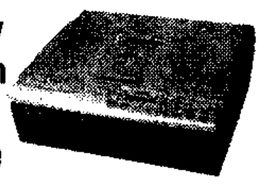

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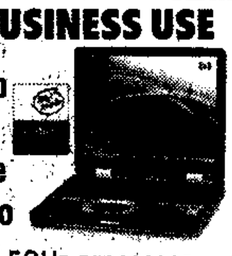

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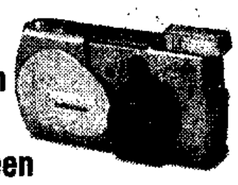

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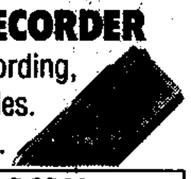

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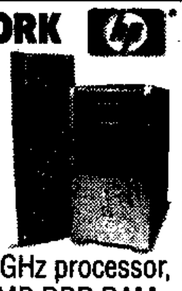

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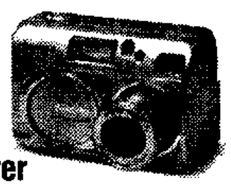

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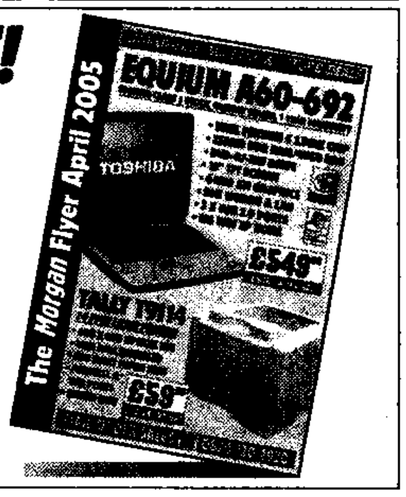

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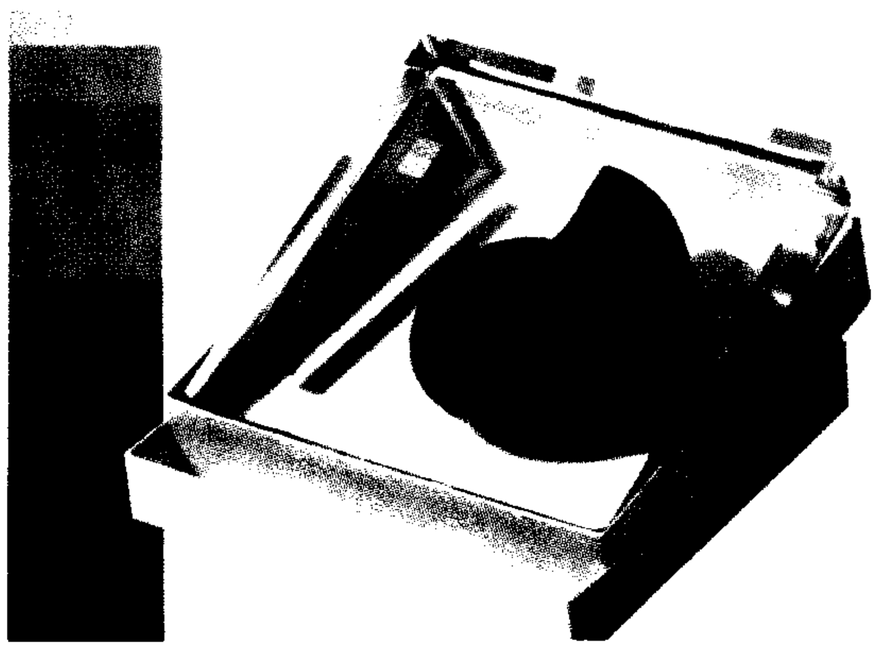

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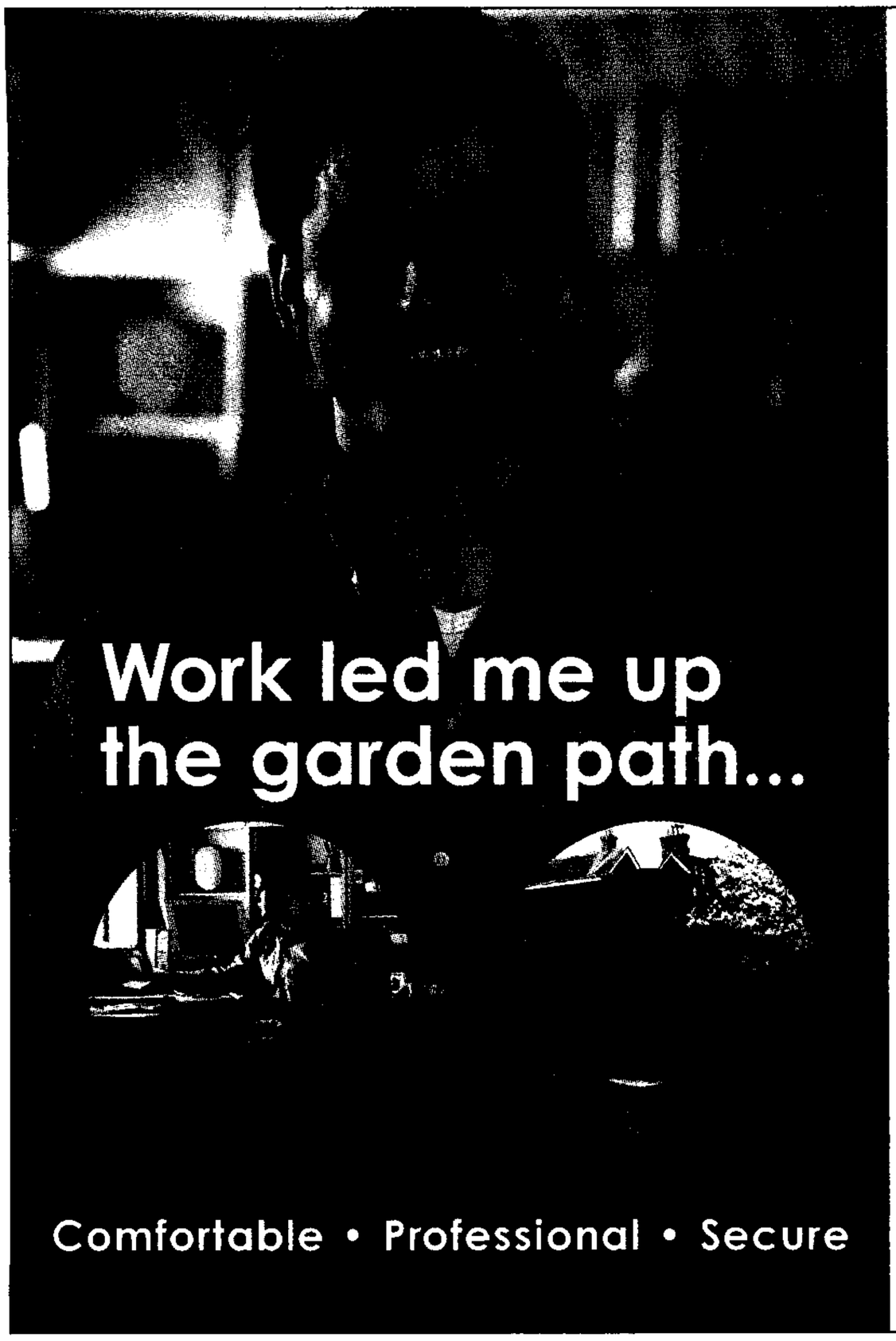

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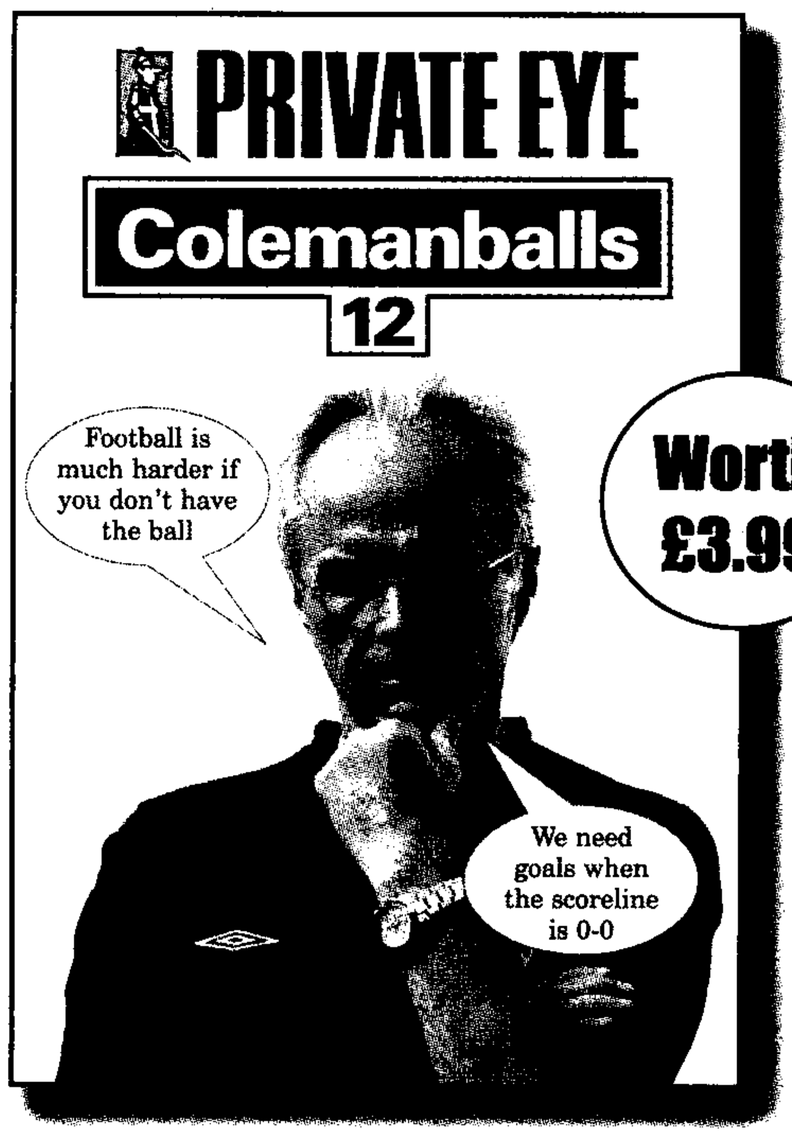
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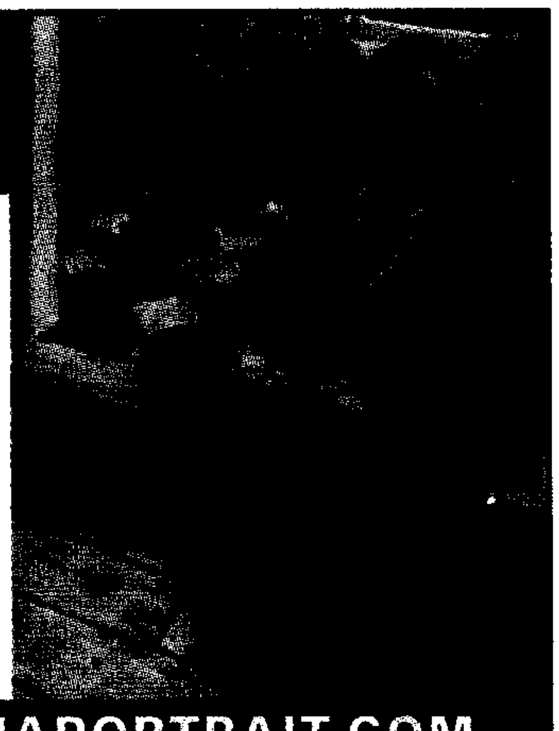

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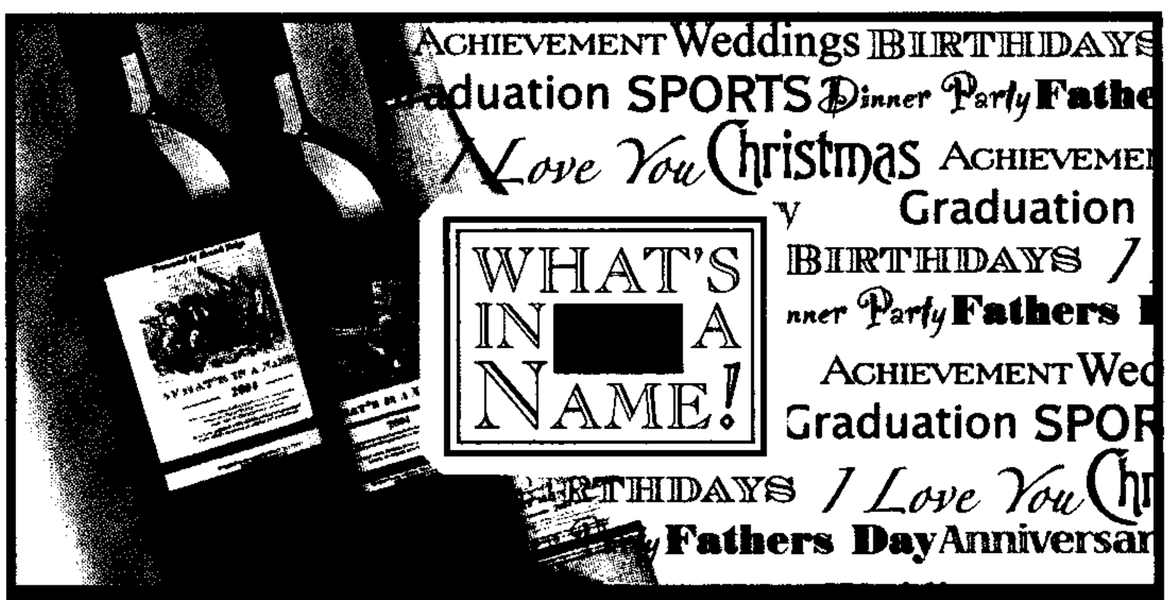

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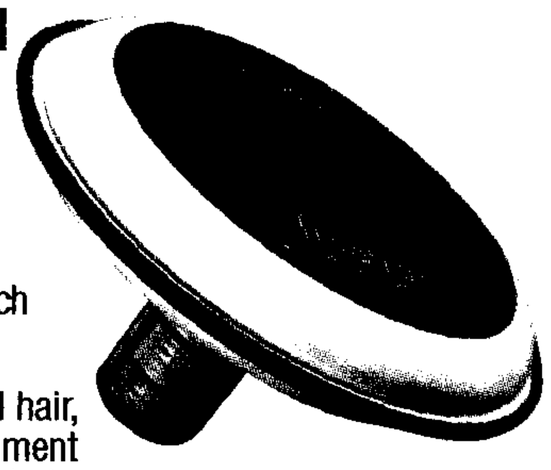

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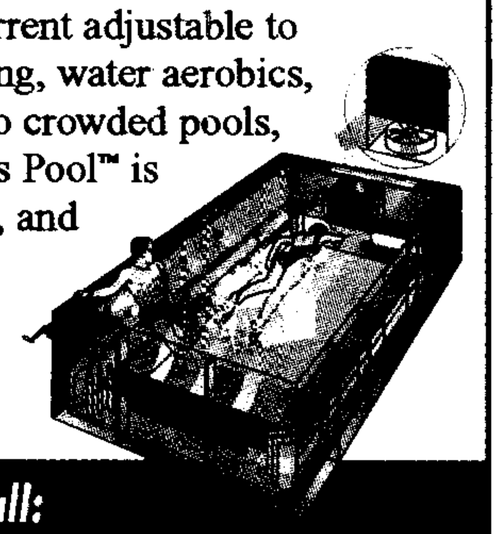

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The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that - a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up - he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

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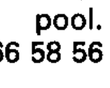

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CHELSEA, SW3, bed-sitting room, TV, en-suite bathroom, large flat, shared kitchen, linen and towels provided, room cleaned weekly. Tube 5 minutes away. Available from Monday-Friday, 3/4 nights per week. £30 per night. Tel: 020 7589 8931.

EYE EVENTS

MAYFAIR SPORTING CLUB. Black tie dinner boxing at The Café Royal. Telephone: 020 7388 5999 or go to www.mayfairsportingclub.com

EYE NEED

SPIRALLING POST-STUDY DEBTS, plus credit cards, bank loans totalling 48K. Not earning enough for repayments. Please help: I'm desperate. S/C: 40-31-06. A/C: 81668633.

FEMALE NURSE IN DISTRESS. Left job through sickness, forced to sell lifetime home. Need help to keep a roof over my head: humility and gratitude. S/C: 30 97 70. A/C: 00339526.

FORMER NURSE, hood-winked by 'partner' urgently needs funding to maintain unique healing centre and valuable research. Halifax, S/C: 11-04-66. A/C: 00782136.

RECENT WIDOW with two young children... a struggle. Any donation gratefully received. NatWest, S/C: 60-12-02. A/C: 14030551.

FECKLESS COMEDIENNES need £5000 for incredible Edinburgh show. We'll give you a badge. HSBC, S/C: 40-03-33. A/C: 21398482.

BEAUTIFUL BUT BROKE lady needs financial help: Genuine replies only as soon as possible. Reply Box 128872.

ENTREPRENEUR needs £15,000 for business venture. Not largesse, but loan. Nationwide, S/C: 07-44-56. A/C: 32296572. Thanks.

YOU ALL DEFINITELY NEED 'Detox your finances', from the 52 Brilliant Ideas series to sort your financial mess out. Just £9.99 (RRP £12.99) including p&p. Cheques payable to Infinite Ideas (36 St Giles, Oxford, OX1 3LD) ref: EYE, or phone with credit card details on 01865 514 888. "The highest praise you can accord a book is to recommend it and this is a book I would recommend to anyone." – *What Investment?*

CRAFTSMAN 36, loosing teeth due to Periodontitis. Needs Soft Tissue Graft in return for my skills. Email: steve2232@hotmail.com

STANDING AS INDEPENDENT against 'Minister for Lies.' £2K needed. stone-for-streatham@hotmail.co.uk

HOSPITAL-ACQUIRED BUG after major surgery – qualified nurse now a jobless 'carrier'. Complaint proceeding slowly and debts mounting. Please help. LloydsTSB, S/C: 30-93-48. A/C: 02732474.

IN SERIOUS DEBIT due to disability, £8,000 needed. Please help. R.B.O.S., S/C: 83-23-10. A/C: 10007537.

£4K NEEDED to get Cuban researcher to Edinburgh for summer school. Defy the blockade! Contact P.Kumaraswami@hw.ac.uk

VERY LAZY STRIPPER needs money to keep her clothes on and change her ways. S/C: 09-01-26. A/C: 48653645.

TALENTED TIME TRAVELLER needs 5K quickly to avoid the gaol; will work. S/C: 40-04-39. A/C: 0123346. iamintrouble@gmail.com

MONEY FOR WEDDING. Betrothed but broke, please help. NatWest S/C: 60-18-01. A/C: 47669489.

HOPELESSLY IN DEBT, any help appreciated. Thank you. A/C: 20222488. S/C: 82-66-25.

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EYE TO EYE

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SIX JAPANESE PRINCESSES with everything except a prince. For an invitation to the palace send photo / letter. Reply Box 128738.

TONY BENN CLONE sought by 66-year young woman. dunlochan@yahoo.com

LITTLE PIXIE BOY, (32), seeks Pixie Girl to dance together hand in hand through this cruel old world – spreading peace and love from our bag of magical pixie dust... pixie_matt@hotmail.com

A NEW MAN and a new life: Young, bright, witty, good looking 52 year male seeks similar female to help run his ski chalet in the French Alps and share apres ski. Reply Box 129404.

EYE CONTACT

MEETING ORIENTAL LADIES in England for love, romance or marriage etc. Tel: 0161 9983 669 / 0788 163 0007 or email: tararainbow@yahoo.co.uk

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GORGEOUS BLONDE, 31, sophisticated, sexy, naughty but nice, seeks presentable gentleman for friendship, maybe more. Wealth is a bonus but soul is more important. allanahtl@yahoo.com

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HIGHLY INTELLIGENT mixed race woman, 49 seeking similar male for discreet, pleasurable relationship. London. Reply Box 129412.

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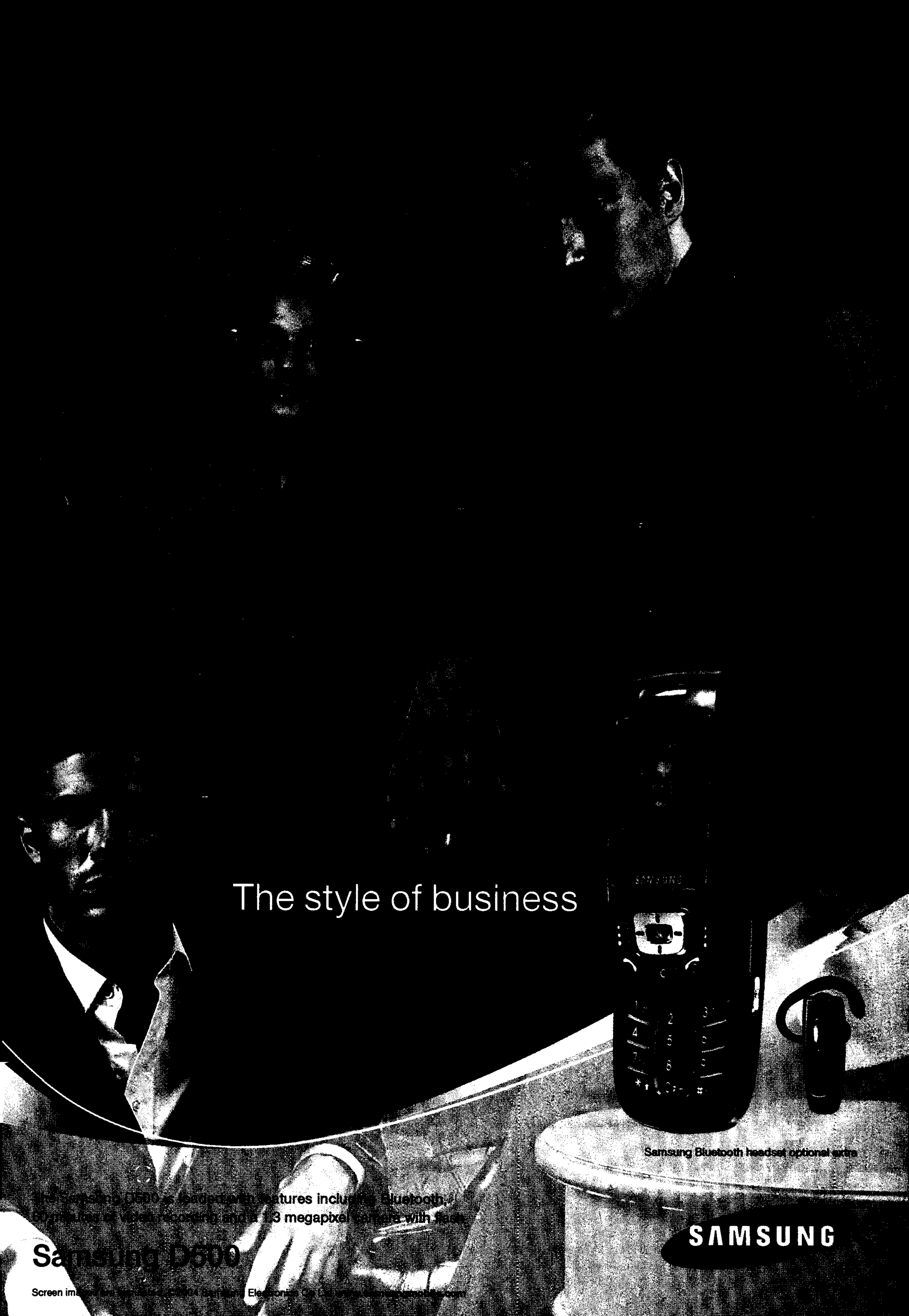

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Model illustrated Saab 9.3 Aero – on the road price £24,495. All prices correct at time of going to press.